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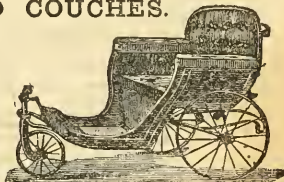
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THE NEW REPUBLIC.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

TOWARDS the close of last July, when the London season was fast dying of the dust, Otho Laurence had invited what the *Morning Post* called 'a select circle of friends,' to spend a quiet Sunday with him at his cool villa by the sea.

This singular retreat was the work of a very singular man, Otho Laurence's uncle, who had squandered on it an immense fortune, and had designed it as far as possible to embody his own tastes and character. He was a member of a Tory family of some note, and had near relations in both Houses of Parliament; but he was himself possessed of a deep though quiet antipathy to the two things generally most cherished by those of

his time and order, the ideas of Christianity and Feudalism ; and he studiously kept himself clear of all public life. Pride of birth, indeed, he had in no small measure ; but it was the pride of a Roman of the Empire rather than of an Englishman ; a pride which, instead of connecting him with prince or people, made him shun the one as a Cæsar, and forget the other as slaves. All his pleasures were those of a lettered voluptuary, who would, as he himself said, have been more in place under Augustus or the Antonines ; and modern existence, under most of its aspects, he affected to regard as barbarous. Next to a bishop, the thing he most disliked was a courtier ; next to a courtier, a fox-hunting country gentleman. But nothing in his life, perhaps, was so characteristic of him as his leaving of it. During his last hours he was soothed by a pretty and somewhat educated housemaid, whom he called Phyllis, and whom he made sit by his bedside, and read aloud to him Gibbon's two chapters on Christianity. Phyllis had just come to the celebrated excerpt from Tertullian, in which that father contemplates the future torments of the unbelievers, when the parish clergyman, who had been sent for by Mr. Laurence's widowed sister-in-law, arrived to offer his services.

‘How shall I admire’¹—these were the words that, read in a low sweet tone, first greeted his ears when he was shown softly into the sick chamber—‘how shall I admire, how laugh, how rejoice, how exult, when I behold so many proud monarchs, so many fancied gods, groaning in the lowest abyss of darkness; so many magistrates who persecuted the name of the Lord, liquefying in a fiercer fire than ever they kindled against the Christians!’ The clergyman was at first much reassured at hearing words so edifying; but when he turned to old Mr. Laurence, he was dismayed to see on his pale face, no signs of awe, but only a faint smile, full of sarcastic humour. He therefore glanced at the book that was lying on the girl’s lap, and discovered to his horror the work of the infidel historian. He was at first struck dumb; but, soon recovering himself, began to say something suitable at once to his own profession and to the sick man’s needs. Mr. Laurence answered him with the greatest courtesy, but with many thanks declined any assistance from him; saying wistfully that he knew he had not long to live, and that his one wish was that he could open his veins in

¹ Vide *Gibbon’s Decline and Fall*, chapter xv.

a bath, and so fade gently into death; 'and then,' he added, 'my soul, if I have one, might perhaps be with Petronius, and with Seneca. And yet sleep would, I think, be better than even their company.' The poor clergyman bade a hasty adieu, and Phyllis resumed her reading. Mr. Laurence listened to every word: the smile returned to his lips that had for a moment left them, and was still upon them when, half-an-hour afterwards, he died, so quietly that Phyllis did not perceive it, but continued her reading for some time to ears that could hear nothing.

All his property he left to his nephew Otho, including his splendid villa, which was indeed, as it was meant to be, a type of its builder. It was a house of pillars, porticoes, and statues, designed ambitiously in what was meant to be a classical style; and though its splendours might not be all perhaps in the best taste, nor even of the most strictly Roman pattern, there was yet an air about its meretricious stateliness by which the days of the Empire were at once suggested to one, a magnificence that would at any rate have pleased Trimalcio, though it might have scandalised Horace.

Otho Laurence inherited with his uncle's

house something of the tastes and feelings of which it was the embodiment. But, though an epicure by training and by temper, he had been open to other influences as well. At one time of his life he had, as it is expressed by some, experienced religion; and not religion only, but thought and speculation also. Indeed, ever since he was twenty-four, he had been troubled by a painful sense that he ought to have some mission in life. The only difficulty was that he could find none that would suit him. He had considerable natural powers, and was in many ways a remarkable man; but, unhappily, one of those who are remarkable because they do not become famous, not because they do. He was one of those of whom it is said till they are thirty, that they will do something; till they are thirty-five, that they might do something if they chose; and after that, that they might have done anything if they had chosen. Laurence was as yet only three years gone in the second stage, but such of his friends as were ambitious for him feared that three years more would find him landed in the third. He, too, was beginning to share this fear; and, not being humble enough to despair of himself, was by this time taking to despair of his century. He

was thus hardly a happy man; but, like many unhappy men, he was capable of keen enjoyments. Chief amongst these was society in certain forms, especially a party in his own house, such as that which he had now assembled there. To this one in particular he looked forward with more than usual pleasure, partly because of the peculiar elements which he had contrived to combine in it, but chiefly because amongst them was to be his friend Robert Leslie, who had been living abroad, and whom he had not seen for two years.

Laurence's aunt, Lady Grace, helped to receive the guests, who by dinner-time on Saturday evening had all arrived. Robert Leslie was the last. The dressing-bell had just done ringing as he drove up to the door, and the others had already gone upstairs; but he found Laurence in the library, sitting with his head on his hand, and a pile of *menu*-cards on the desk before him. The two friends met with much warmth, and then examined each other's faces to see if either had changed.

'You told me you had been ill,' said Laurence, having again looked at Leslie, 'and I am afraid you don't seem quite well yet.'

‘You forget,’ said Leslie, whose laugh was a little hollow, ‘that I was on the sea six hours ago; and, as you know, I am a wretched sailor. But the worst of human maladies are the most transient also—love that is half despairing, and sea-sickness that is quite so.’

‘I congratulate you,’ said Laurence, again examining his friend’s face, ‘on your true cynical manner. I often thought we might have masters in cynicism just as we have masters in singing. Perhaps I shall be able to learn the art from you.’

‘Oh!’ said Leslie, ‘the theory is simple enough. Find out, by a little suffering, what are the things you hold most sacred, and most firmly believe in, and, whenever an occasion offers, deny your faith. A cynic is a kind of inverted confessor, perpetually making enemies for the sake of what he knows to be false.’

‘Ah!’ said Laurence, ‘but I don’t want theory. I know what is sacred just as well as you, and, when I am beast enough to be quite out of tune with it, I have the good sense to call it a phantom. But I don’t do this with sufficient energy. It is skill in cynical practice I want—a lesson in the pungent manner—the bitter tone—’

‘Then please not to take your lessons from me,’ said Leslie. ‘Imitation may be the sincerest flattery, but it is, of all, the most irritating: and a cynic, as you are good enough to call me, feels this especially. For a cynic is the one preacher, remember, that never wants to make converts. His aim is to outrage, not to convince: to create enemies, not to conquer them. The peculiar charm that his creed has for him, is his own peculiarity in holding it. He is an acid that can only fizz with an alkali, and he therefore hates in others what he most admires in himself. So if you hear me say a bitter thing, please be good enough to brim over immediately with the milk of human kindness. If I say anything disrespectful about friendship, please be good enough to look hurt; and if I happen to say—what is the chief part of the cynic’s stock-in-trade—that no woman was ever sincere or faithful, I trust you have some lady amongst your visitors who will look at me with mournful eyes, and say to me, “Ah, if you did but know!”’

‘Well,’ said Laurence, ‘perhaps I have; but, talking of what people are to say, I have something here about which I want you to help me. You see these cards; they are all double. Now that second half is for some-

thing quite new, and of my own invention. The cook has written his part already, so you need not look so alarmed; but he has only provided for the tongue as a tasting instrument; I am going to provide for it as a talking one. In fact, I am going to have a *menu* for the conversation, and to this I shall make everyone strictly adhere. For it has always seemed absurd to me to be so careful about what we put into our mouths, and to leave chance to arrange what comes out of them; to be so particular as to the order of what we eat, and to have no order at all in what we talk about. This is the case especially in parties like the present, where most of the people know each other only a little, and if left to themselves would never touch on the topics that would make them best acquainted, and best bring out their several personal flavours. That is what I like to see conversation doing. I ought to have written these *menus* before; but I have been busy all day, and, besides, I wanted you to help me. I was just beginning without you when you arrived, as I could wait no longer; but I have put down nothing yet: indeed I could not fix upon the first topic that is to correspond with the soup—the first vernal breath of discussion that is to open the buds of the shy and

strange souls. So come, now—what shall we begin with? What we want is something that anyone can talk easily about, whether he knows anything of it or not—something, too, that may be treated in any way, either with laughter, feeling, or even a little touch of temper.'

'Love,' suggested Leslie.

'That is too strong to begin with,' said Laurence, 'and too real. Besides, introduced in that way, it would be, I think, rather common and vulgar. No—the only thing that suggested itself to me was religion.'

'Nothing could be better in some ways,' said Leslie; 'but might not that, too, be rather strong meat for some? I apprehend, like Bottom, that "the ladies might be afeared of the lion." I should suggest rather the question, "Are you High-church or Low-church?" There is something in that which at once disarms reverence, and may also just titillate the interests, the temper, or the sense of humour. Quick,' he said, taking one of the cards, 'and let us begin to write.'

'Stop,' said Laurence; 'not so fast, let me beg of you. Instead of religion, or anything connected with it, we will have, 'What is the Aim of Life?' Is not this the thing

of things to suit us? About what do we know less or talk more? There is a Sphinx in each of our souls that is always asking us this riddle; and when we are lazy or disappointed, we all of us lounge up to her, and make languid guesses. So about this we shall all of us have plenty to say, and can say it in any way we like, flippant, serious, or sentimental. Think, too, how many avenues of thought and feeling it opens up! Evidently the "Aim of Life" is the thing to begin with.'

Leslie assented; and before many minutes they had made the *menu* complete.

The 'Aim of Life' was to be followed by 'Town and Country,' which was designed to introduce a discussion as to where the Aim of Life was to be best attained. After this, by an easy transition, came 'Society;' next by way of *entrées*, 'Art and Literature,' 'Love and Money,' 'Riches and Civilisation;' then 'The Present,' as something solid and satisfying; and lastly, a light superfluity to dally with, brightly coloured and unsubstantial, with the *entremets* came 'The Future.'

'And who is here,' said Leslie, as they were ending their labours, 'to enjoy this feast of reason?'

‘I will tell you,’ said Laurence. ‘In the first place, there is Lady Ambrose, a woman of a very old but poor family, who has married a modern M.P. with more than a million of money. She is very particular about knowing the right people, and has lovely, large grey eyes. Then there is Miss Merton, a Roman Catholic young lady, the daughter of old Sir Ascot Merton, the horse-racing evangelical. I knew her well five years ago, but had not seen her since her conversion, till to-day. Then we have Dr. Jenkinson, the great Broad-church divine who thinks that Christianity is not dead, but changed by himself and his followers in the twinkling of an eye.’

‘I met Dr. Jenkinson,’ said Leslie, ‘just before I went abroad, at a great dinner given by Baron Isaacs, in honour of his horse having won the Derby. Well—and who else is there?’

‘Two celebrated members of the Royal Society,’ said Laurence; ‘no less persons than——But, good gracious! it is time we were up-stairs dressing. Come along directly, and I will explain the other people to you before dinner.’

CHAPTER II.

IT was half-past eight, and the party were fast assembling in the twilight drawing-room. Leslie was lounging in one of the windows, by a large stand of flowers and broad-leaved plants, and was studying the company with considerable interest. His first impression was of little more than of a number of men's dark coats and white shirt-fronts, tables, couches, and gilded chairs, and the pleasant many-coloured glimmerings of female apparel. But before long he had observed more minutely. There were men who he instinctively felt were celebrities, discoursing to groups of ladies; there were ladies who he at once saw were attractive, being discoursed to by groups of men. He very soon detected Lady Ambrose, a fine handsome woman of perhaps thirty, with the large grey eyes of which Laurence had spoken, and a very clear complexion. Leslie was much prepossessed by her frank manner, and by her

charming voice, as she was talking with some animation to a tall distinguished-looking young man, whose fine features, keen earnest glance, and thoughtful expression prepossessed him still more. Forming a third in this group, dropping in a word or two at intervals, he recognised the celebrated Dr. Jenkinson—still full of vigour, though his hair was silver—the sharp and restless sparkle of whose eyes, strangely joined with the most benevolent of smiles, Leslie remembered to have noticed at Baron Isaacs' festival. He had just identified Lady Ambrose and the Doctor, when Laurence came up to him in the window, and began to tell him who was who.

‘Dr. Jenkinson is the only one I know,’ said Leslie, ‘and, naturally enough, he forgets me.’

‘Well,’ said Laurence, ‘that man by himself, turning over the books on the table—the man with the black whiskers, spectacles, and bushy eyebrows—is Mr. Storks of the Royal Society, who is great on the physical basis of life and the imaginative basis of God. The man with long locks in the window, explaining a microscope in so eager a way to that dark-haired girl, is Professor Stockton—of the Royal Society also; and

member and president of many Societies more. The girl—child, rather, I ought to call her—that he is talking to, is Lady Violet Gresham—my second cousin. You see my aunt, the old lady with grey curls, on the ottoman near the fire-place? Well—the supercilious-looking man, talking rather loudly and rather slowly to her about the dust in London, is Mr. Luke, the great critic and apostle of culture. That, too, is another critic close by him—the pale creature, with large moustache, looking out of the window at the sunset. He is Mr. Rose, the pre-Raphaelite. He always speaks in an undertone, and his two topics are self-indulgence and art. The young man there with Lady Ambrose and Dr. Jenkinson, is Lord Allen. He is only two- or three-and-twenty; still, had you been in England lately, you would often have heard his name. He has come early into an immense property, and he yet is conscious that he has duties in life. But,’ said Laurence, sighing, ‘he too feels, as I do, that he has fallen on evil days, in which there can be no peace for us—little but doubt and confusion, and what seems to me a losing battle against the spiritual darkness of this world. However—that red-headed youth thinks very differently. He

is Mr. Saunders from Oxford, supposed to be very clever and advanced. Next him is Donald Gordon, who has deserted deer-stalking and the Kirk, for literature and German metaphysics.'

'And who is that,' said Leslie, 'the young lady with those large and rather sad-looking eyes, and the delicate, proud mouth?'

'Which?' said Laurence.

'The one on the sofa,' said Leslie, 'who looks so like a Reynolds portrait—like a duchess of the last century—the lady in the pale blue dress, talking to that man with such a curiously attractive smile and the worn melancholy look?'

'That,' said Laurence, 'is Miss Merton. I am glad you admire her. And don't you know who it is she is talking to? He is almost the only man of these days for whom I feel a real reverence—almost the only one of our teachers who seems to me to speak with the least breath of inspiration. But he is too impressionable, perhaps—too much like me, in that way. And now, as the years come, it seems that hope is more and more leaving him, and things look darker to him than ever. That is Herbert.'

'Herbert!' exclaimed Leslie, 'so it is. I thought I recollected the face. I have heard

him lecture several times at the Royal Institution ; and that singular voice of his, which would often hold all the theatre breathless, haunts me still, sometimes. There was something strange and ærial in its exquisite modulations, that seemed as if it came from a disconsolate spirit, hovering over the waters of Babylon, and remembering Sion. I can't tell exactly why it was that—but, ah !—my dear Laurence—who is this, that is coming into the room now—this lovely creature, with a dress like a red azalea ? What speaking eyes ! And what hair, too—deep dead black, with those white starry blossoms in it. I don't think I ever saw anyone move so gracefully ; and how proudly and piquantly she poises

On her neck the small head buoyant, like bell-flower
on its bed !'

'That,' said Laurence, when Leslie had done, 'is Mrs. Sinclair, who has published a volume of poems, and is a sort of fashionable London Sappho. But come,—we shall be going into dinner directly. You shall have Lady Ambrose on one side of you, and shall take in Miss Merton.'

CHAPTER III.

LAURENCE, though he had forewarned his guests of his *menu* before they left the drawing-room, yet felt a little anxious when they sat down to dinner; for he found it not altogether easy to get the conversation started. Lady Ambrose, who was the first to speak, began somewhat off the point.

‘What a charming change it is, Mr. Laurence,’ she said, ‘to look out on the sea when one is dressing, instead of across South Audley Street!’

‘Hush!’ said Laurence softly, with a grave, reproving smile.

‘Really,’ said Lady Ambrose, ‘I beg your pardon. I thought Dr. Jenkinson had said grace.’

‘If he has,’ said Laurence, ‘it is very good of him, for I am afraid he was not asked. But what I mean is, that you must only talk of what is on the cards; so be good

enough to look at your *menu*, and devote your attention to the Aim of Life.'

'Really, this is much too alarming,' said Lady Ambrose. 'How is one to talk at so short a notice on a subject one has never thought about before?'

'Why, to do so,' said Laurence, 'is the very art of conversation; for in that way, one's ideas spring up fresh like young roses that have all the dew on them, instead of having been kept drying for half a lifetime between the leaves of a book. So do set a good example, and begin, or else we shall never be started at all; and my pet plan will turn out a fiasco.'

There was, indeed, as Laurence said this, something very near complete silence all round the table. It was soon broken.

'Are you High-church or Low-church?' was a question suddenly uttered in a quick eager girl's voice by Miss Prattle, a young lady of eighteen, to the astonishment of the whole company. It was addressed to Dr. Jenkinson who was sitting next her.

Had a pin been run into the Doctor's leg, he could not have looked more astounded, or given a greater start. He eyed his fair questioner for some time in complete silence.

'Can you tell me the difference?' he

said at last, in a voice of considerable good humour, yet with just a touch of sharpness in it.

‘I think,’ said Miss Merton, who was sitting on the other side of him, ‘that my card is a little different. I have the “Aim of Life” on mine, and so I believe has everybody else.’

‘Well,’ said the Doctor, laughing, ‘let us ask Miss Prattle what is her aim in life.’

‘Thank Heaven,’ said Laurence, ‘Dr. Jenkinson has begun. I hope we shall all now follow.’

Laurence’s hope was not in vain. The conversation soon sprang up everywhere; and the company, though in various humours, took most of them very kindly to the solemn topic that had been put before them. Mr. Luke, who was sitting by Mrs. Sinclair, was heard in a loudish voice saying that his own favourite Muse had always been Erato; Mr. Rose had taken a crimson flower from a vase on the table, and, looking at it himself with a grave regard, was pointing out its infinite and passionate beauties to the lady next him; and Mr. Stockton was explaining that the Alps looked grander, and the sky bluer than ever, to those who truly realised the atomic theory. No one, indeed, was silent except

Mr. Herbert and Mr. Storcks, the former of whom smiled rather sadly, whilst the latter looked about him with an inquisitorial frown.

Laurence was delighted with the state of things, and surveyed the table with great satisfaction. Whilst his attention was thus engaged, Lady Ambrose turned to Leslie, and began asking him if he had been in town much this season. She was taken with his look, and wished to find out if he would really be a nice person to like.

‘Please,’ interposed Laurence pleadingly, ‘do try and keep to the point—please, Lady Ambrose.’

‘I want to find out Mr. Leslie’s aim in life by asking him where he has been,’ she answered.

‘I have been in a great many places,’ said Leslie, ‘but not to pursue any end—only to try and forget that I had no end to pursue.’

‘This is a very sad state of things,’ said Lady Ambrose; ‘I can always find something to do, except when I am quite alone, or in the country when the house is empty. And even then I can *make* occupation. I draw, or read a book, or teach my little boy some lessons. But come—what do you think is the real aim of life?—since that is what I must ask him, is it not, Mr. Laurence?’

‘Don’t ask me,’ said Leslie; ‘I told you I hadn’t a notion; and I don’t suppose we any of us have.’

‘That can’t be true,’ said Lady Ambrose, ‘for just listen how everyone is talking. I wish we could hear what they are saying. You might learn something then, perhaps, Mr. Leslie, since you are so very ignorant.’

It happened that, as Lady Ambrose said this, the conversation suddenly flagged, and Laurence took advantage of the lull to ask if any satisfactory conclusions had been come to during the past five minutes, ‘because we up here,’ he said, ‘are very much in the dark, and want to be enlightened.’

‘Yes,’ said Mr. Storks gruffly, ‘has any one found out what is the aim of life?’ As he said this he looked about him defiantly, as though all the others were butterflies, that he could break, if he chose, upon his wheel. His eye at last lit upon Mr. Saunders, who, considering this a challenge to himself, immediately took up the gauntlet. The young man spoke with the utmost composure, and, as his voice was high and piercing, everybody could hear him.

‘The aim of life,’ he said, adjusting his spectacles, ‘is progress.’

‘What is progress?’ interrupted Dr.

Jenkinson coldly, without looking at Mr. Saunders, and as though any answer to his question was the last thing he expected.

‘Progress,’ replied Mr. Saunders slowly, ‘has been found, like poetry, somewhat hard to define.’

‘Very true,’ said the Doctor drily, and looking straight before him.

His accents were of so freezing a sharpness that he seemed to be stabbing Mr. Saunders with an icicle. Mr. Saunders, however, was apparently quite unwounded.

‘But I,’ he continued with the utmost complacency, ‘have discovered a definition which will, I think, meet with general acceptance. There is nothing original in it—it is merely an abstract of the meaning of all our great liberal thinkers—progress is such improvement as can be verified by statistics, just as education is such knowledge as can be tested by examinations. That, I conceive, is a very adequate definition of the most advanced conception of progress, and to persuade people in general to accept this is at present one of the chief duties of all earnest men.’

‘Entirely true!’ said Mr. Herbert, with ironical emphasis; ‘an entirely true definition of progress as our age prizes it.’

Mr. Saunders was delighted, and, imagining he had made a disciple, he turned to Mr. Herbert and went on.

‘For just let us,’ he said, ‘compare a man with a gorilla, and see in what the man’s superiority lies. It is evidently not in the man’s ideas of God, and so forth—for in his presumable freedom from these the gorilla is the superior of the man—but in the hard and verifiable fact, that the man can build houses and cotton-mills, whereas the highest monkey can scarcely make the rudest approach to a hut.’

‘But can you tell me,’ said Mr. Herbert, ‘supposing men some day come to a state in which no more of this progress is possible, what will they do then?’

‘Mr. Mill, whom in almost all things I reverence as a supreme authority,’ said Mr. Saunders, ‘asked himself that very question. But the answer he gave himself was one of the few things in which I venture to dissent from him. For, when all the greater evils of life shall have been removed, he thinks the human race is to find its chief enjoyment in reading Wordsworth’s poetry.’¹

‘Indeed!’ said Mr. Herbert; ‘and did

¹ *Vide* J. S. Mill’s Autobiography.

Mill come to any conclusion so sane as that?’

‘I, on the contrary, believe,’ Mr. Saunders went on, ‘that as long as the human race lasts, it will still have some belief in God left in it, and that the eradication of this will afford an unending employment to all enlightened minds.’

Leslie looked at Lady Ambrose, expecting to see her smile. On the contrary she was very grave, and said, ‘I think this is shocking.’

‘Well,’ said Laurence in a soothing tone to her, ‘it is only the way of these young men in times of change like ours. Besides, he is very young—he has only just left Oxford——’

‘If these irreligious views are to be picked up at Oxford,’ said Lady Ambrose, ‘I shall be obliged to send my little boy, when he grows up, to Cambridge. And as for what you say about “times of change”—I am not a conservative, as you know—indeed, I quite go in for reform, as my husband does: but I don’t think *religion* ought to be dragged into the matter.’

‘Well,’ said Laurence, ‘let us listen to what Lord Allen is saying.’

‘*He* is sure,’ said Lady Ambrose, ‘not to say anything but what is nice.’

Allen was speaking in a low tone, but his voice was so clear that Lady Ambrose was quite able to hear him.

‘To me it seems,’ he was saying, blushing a little as he found suddenly how many people were listening to him, ‘that the aim of life has nearly always been plain enough in a certain way—always, and for all men——’

‘Indeed?’ said Mr. Saunders, raising his eyebrows.

‘Yes,’ said Allen, slightly turning towards him, and raising his voice somewhat. ‘It has been, I think, as a single magnet, acting on all, though upon many by repulsion. It is quite indescribable in words. But there are two things by which you can tell a man’s truth to it—a faith in God, and a longing for a future life.’

‘Lord Allen,’ exclaimed Mr. Herbert, and the sound of his voice made everyone at once a listener, ‘that is very beautifully put! And it is, indeed, quite true, as you say, that the real significance of life must be for ever indescribable in words. But, in the present day, I fear also that for most of us it is not even thinkable in thought. The whole human race,’ he went on in measured melancholy accents, ‘is now wandering in an accursed

wilderness, which not only shows us no hill-top whence the promised land may be seen, but which, to most of the wanderers, seems a promised land itself. And they have a God of their own too, who engages now to lead them out of it if they will only follow him : who, for visible token of his Godhead, leads them with a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night—the cloud being the black smoke of their factory chimneys, and the fire the red glare of their blast-furnaces. And so effectual are these modern divine guides, that if we were standing on the brink of Jordan itself, we should be utterly unable to catch, through the fire and the smoke, one single glimpse of the sunlit hills beyond.’

Mr. Herbert said these last words almost fiercely ; and they were followed by a complete hush. It was almost directly broken by Mr. Rose.

‘To me,’ he said, raising his eyebrows wearily, and sending his words floating down the table in a languid monotone, ‘Mr. Herbert’s whole metaphor seems misleading. I rather look upon life as a chamber, which we decorate as we would decorate the chamber of the woman or the youth that we love, tinting the walls of it with symphonies

of subdued colour, and filling it with works of fair form, and with flowers, and with strange scents, and with instruments of music. And this can be done now as well—better, rather—than at any former time: since we know that so many of the old aims were false, and so cease to be distracted by them. We have learned the weariness of creeds; and know that for us the grave has no secrets. We have learned that the aim of life is life; and what does successful life consist in? Simply,' said Mr. Rose, speaking very slowly, and with a soft solemnity, 'in the consciousness of exquisite living—in the making our own each highest thrill of joy that the moment offers us—be it some touch of colour on the sea or on the mountains, the early dew in the crimson shadows of a rose, the shining of a woman's limbs in clear water, or——'

Here unfortunately a sound of 'Sh' broke softly from several mouths. Mr. Rose was slightly disconcerted, and a pause that would have been a little awkward seemed imminent. Laurence, to prevent this, did the first thing that occurred to him, and hastily asked Dr. Jenkinson what his view of the matter was.

The Doctor's answer came in his very sharpest voice.

‘Do any of us know what life is?’ he said. ‘Hadn’t we better find that out first?’

‘Life,’ continued Mr. Rose, who had now recovered himself, ‘is a series of moments and emotions.’

‘And a series of absurdities too, very often,’ said Dr. Jenkinson.

‘Life is a solemn mystery,’ said Mr. Storks, severely.

‘Life is a damned nuisance,’ muttered Leslie to himself, but just loud enough to be heard by Lady Ambrose, who smiled at him with a sense of humour that won his heart at once.

‘Life is matter,’ Mr. Storks went on, ‘which, under certain conditions not yet fully understood, has become self-conscious.’

‘Lord Allen has just been saying that it is the preface to eternity,’ said Mr. Saunders.

‘Only, unfortunately,’ said Laurence, ‘it is a preface that we cannot skip, and the dedication is generally made to the wrong person.’

‘All our doubts on this matter,’ said Mr. Saunders, ‘are simply due to that dense pestiferous fog of crazed sentiment that still hides our view, but which the present generation has sternly set its face to dispel and

conquer. Science will drain the marshy grounds of the human mind, so that the deadly malaria of Christianity, which has already destroyed two civilisations, shall never be fatal to a third.'

'I should rather have thought,' said Mrs. Sinclair, in her soft clear voice, and casting down her eyes thoughtfully, 'that passion and feeling were the real heart of the matter: and that religion of some sort was an ingredient in all perfect passion. There are seeds of feeling in every soul, but these will never rise up into flowers without some culture—will they, Mr. Luke? And this culture is, surely,' she said dreamily, 'the work of Love who is the gardener of the soul, and of Religion, the under-gardener, acting as Love bids it.'

'Ah, yes!' said Mr. Luke, looking compassionately about him. 'Culture! Mrs. Sinclair is quite right; for without culture we can never understand Christianity, and Christianity, whatever the vulgar may say of it, is the key to life, and is co-extensive with it.'

Lady Ambrose was charmed with this sentiment.

'Quite so, Mr. Luke, I quite agree with you,' she said, in her most cordial manner.

‘But I wish you would tell me a little more about Culture. I am always so much interested in those things.’

‘Culture,’ said Mr. Luke, ‘is the union of two things—fastidious taste and liberal sympathy. These can only be gained by wide reading guided by sweet reason ; and when they are gained, Lady Ambrose, we are conscious, as it were, of a new sense, which at once enables us to discern the Eternal and the absolutely righteous, wherever we find it, whether in an epistle of St. Paul’s or in a comedy of Menander’s. It is true that culture sets aside the larger part of the New Testament as grotesque, barbarous, and immoral ; but what remains, purged of its apparent meaning, it discerns to be a treasure beyond all price. And in Christianity—such Christianity, I mean, as true taste can accept—culture sees the guide to the real significance of life, and the explanation,’ Mr. Luke added with a sigh, ‘of that melancholy which in our day is attendant upon all clear sight.’

‘But why,’ said Allen, ‘if you know so well what life’s meaning is, need you feel this melancholy at all?’

‘Ah!’ said Mr. Luke, ‘it is from this very knowledge that the melancholy I speak

of springs. We—the cultured—we indeed see. But the world at large does not. It will not listen to us. It thinks we are talking nonsense. Surely that is enough to sadden us. Then, too, our ears are perpetually being pained and deafened by the din of the two opposing Philistinisms—science and orthodoxy—both equally vulgar, and equally useless. But the masses cannot see this. It is impossible to persuade some that science can teach them nothing worth knowing, and others that the dogmatic utterances of the gospels are either ignorant mistakes or oriental metaphors. Don't you find this, Jenkinson?' he added, addressing the Doctor across the table in a loud mournful voice.

'Laurence,' said the Doctor, apparently not hearing the question, 'haven't we talked of this quite long enough? *Town and Country*—let us go on to that; or else we shall be getting very much behind-hand.'

These words of the Doctor's caused a rapid change in the conversation. And as it appeared impossible to agree as to what the aim of life was, most turned eagerly to the simpler question of where it might be best attained. At first there seemed to be a general sense on all sides that it was

a duty to prefer the country. There, the voices of Nature spoke to the soul more freely, the air was purer and fresher; the things in life that were really valuable were more readily taken at their true worth; foolish vanities and trivial cares were less likely to degrade the character; one could have flowers; one could listen to the music of birds and rivers; a country house was more comfortable than a town one; and few prospects were so charming as an English park. But the voice of Mr. Saunders was soon heard proclaiming that progress was almost entirely confined to towns, and that the modern liberal could find little scope for action in the country. 'If he does anything there,' Mr. Saunders said, 'he can only make his tenants more comfortable and contented; and that is simply attaching them more to the existing order of things. Indeed, even now, as matters stand, the healthy rustic, with his fresh complexion and honest eye, is absolutely incapable of appreciating the tyranny of religion and society. But the true liberal is undeceived by his pleasing exterior, and sees a far nobler creature in the pale narrow-chested operative of the city, who at once responds to the faintest cry of insurgence.'

Slight causes often produce large results ; and these utterances of Mr. Saunders turned the entire torrent of opinion into a different channel. Mr. Luke, who had a moment before been talking about 'liberal air,' and 'sedged brooks,' and 'meadow grass,' now admitted that one's country neighbours were sure to be narrow-minded sectarians, and that it was better to live amongst cultured society, even under a London fog, than to look at all the splendour of provincial sunsets, in company with a parson who could talk of nothing but his parishioners and justification by faith. Others, too, followed in the same direction ; and the verdict of the majority soon seemed to be that, except in a large country house, country life, though it might be very beautiful, was still very tiresome. But the voice of Mr. Saunders was again heard, during a pause, laying it down that no true liberal could ever care to live in the country now ; and Lady Ambrose, who highly disapproved of him and his views in general, saw here a fitting opportunity for contradicting him, asserting that, though she and her husband were both advanced liberals, yet the pleasantest part of their year was that spent upon their moor in Scotland. 'And then, too,' she added, turning to Laurence, 'I am devoted

to our place in Gloucestershire, and I would not miss for anything such things as my new dairy, and my cottages, with the old women in them.'

'And yet,' said Laurence, smiling, 'Sir George would never go near the place if it were not for the shooting.'

'Indeed he would,' said Lady Ambrose, a little indignantly. 'He likes the life so much, and is so fond of his gardens, and greenhouses, and——'

But she was here interrupted by Mr. Herbert, who, mistaking the Sir George Ambrose mentioned for another Baronet of the same name—a gentleman of a very old but impoverished Catholic family—broke in as follows, somewhat to the consternation of Lady Ambrose, whose husband was a great cotton-spinner, of the most uncertain origin.

'Sir George,' he said, 'is, as I know well, an entirely honest gentleman of ancient lineage. He is indeed a perfectly beautiful type of what the English Squire properly ought to be. For he lives upon his own land, and amongst his own people; and is a complete and lovely example to them of a life quite simple indeed, but in the highest sense loyal, noble, and orderly. But what is one amongst so many? To most of his own order Sir

George Ambrose appears merely as a madman, because he sees that it is altogether a nobler thing for a man to be brave and chivalrous than it is to be fashionable; and because he looks forward on his dying day to remembering the human souls that he has saved alive, rather than the pheasants that he has shot dead.'

Now, the husband of Lady Ambrose being known to most present for his magnificent new country house, his immense preserves, and his yacht of four hundred tons that never went out of the Solent, there was naturally some wonder excited by Mr. Herbert's words, since the thought of any other Sir George never came for an instant into anyone's head. Lady Ambrose herself was in utter amazement. She could not tell what to make of it, and she was as near looking confused as she had ever been in her life. The awkwardness of the situation was felt by many: and to cover it a hum of conversation sprang up, with forced alacrity. But this did not make matters much better; for in a very short time Mr. Herbert's voice was again audible, uttering words of no measured denunciation against the great land-owners of England, 'who were once,' he said, 'in some true sense a Nobility, but are now the por-

tentousest Ignobility that the world ever set eyes upon.' Everyone felt that this was approaching dangerous ground: nor were they at all reassured when Mr. Herbert, who was, it appeared, quoting from a letter which he had received, he said, that morning from the greatest of modern thinkers, concluded amidst a complete silence with the following passage, '*Yes, here they come, with coats of the newest fashion, with pedigrees of the newest forging, with their moors in Scotland, with their rivers in Norway, with their game preserves in England, with some thousands of human beings calling them masters, somewhere—they probably forget where—and with the mind of a thinking man, or with the heart of a gentleman, nowhere. Here they come, our cotton-spinning plutocrats, bringing in luxury, and vulgarity, and damnation!*'

These last words came like a thunder-clap. Laurence hardly knew where to look. The result, however, was more satisfactory than could have been expected. There are some emotions, as we all know, that can be calmed best by tears. Lady Ambrose did not cry. She did something better—she laughed.

'What would poor Sir George say?' she whispered to Laurence. 'He is fishing in

Norway at this very moment. But do you really think,' she went on, being resolved not to shirk the subject, 'that Society is really as bad as Mr. Herbert says? I was looking into the Comte de Grammont's Memoirs the other day, and I am sure nothing goes on in London now so bad as what he describes.'

'Do you know, Lady Ambrose,' said Mr. Herbert, who concluded that he had given her much pleasure by his late remarks, 'I think the state of London at the present day infinitely worse than anything Grammont or his biographer could have dreamt of.'

'Quite so,' said Mr. Luke; 'the bulk of men in our days are just as immoral as they were in Charles the Second's; the only difference is that they are incomparably more stupid; and that, instead of decking their immorality with the jewels of wit, they clumsily try to cover it with the tarpaulin of respectability. This has not made the immorality any the better; it has only made respectability the most contemptible word in the English language.'

'The fop of Charles's time,' said Leslie, 'aimed at seeming a wit and a scholar. The fop of ours aims at being a fool and a dunce.'

‘Yes,’ said Mr. Herbert, ‘society was diseased then, it is true, and marks of disease disfigured and scarred its features. Still, in spite of this, it had some sound life left in it. But now the entire organism is dissolving and falling asunder. All the parts are refusing to perform their functions. How, indeed, could this possibly be otherwise, when the head itself, the aristocracy, the part whose special office is to see and think, has now lost completely both its brains and eyes, and has nothing head-like left it except the mouth ; and that cannot so much as speak. It can only eat and yawn.’

‘Society, you see, Mr. Herbert,’ said Lady Ambrose, who felt bound to say something, ‘is so much larger now than it was.’

‘Oh,’ said Laurence, shrugging his shoulders, ‘in that sense, I really think there is almost no society now.’

‘I don’t see how there can be,’ said Miss Merton, ‘when what is called society is simply one great scramble after fashion. And fashion is such a delicate fruit, that it is sure to be spoilt if it is scrambled for.’

‘I am glad,’ said Laurence, ‘you don’t abuse fashion as some people do. I look on it as the complexion of good society, and as

the rouge of bad; and when society gets sickly and loses its complexion, it takes to rouge—as it is doing now; and the rouge eats into its whole system, and makes its health worse than ever.’

‘You are the last person, Mr. Laurence,’ said Lady Ambrose, ‘you who go out so much, that I should have expected to hear talking against society like that.’

‘Ah!’ said Laurence, ‘we cannot escape from our circumstances: I only wish we could. I go into the best society I can get, but I am not blind to the fact that it is very bad. Of course there are a number of the most delightful people in it: I am not denying that for a moment. But not only is society not made up out of a few of its parts, but even the best parts suffer from the tone of the whole. And taking society as a whole, I honestly doubt if it was ever at any time so generally bad as it is now. I am not saying that it has forgotten its duties—that it cannot even conceive that it ever had any; that is of course quite true: but Mr. Herbert has said that already. I am not complaining of its moral badness, but of its social badness—of its want of practical skill in life as a fine art—a want that it often feels itself, and yet has not the skill to remedy.

Think for a moment how barbarous are its amusements ; how little culture there is in its general tone ; how incapable it is of any enlightened interest !’

‘ Really,’ said Mr. Stockton, ‘ I think you are doing society a great injustice. It seems to me that enlightened interest is the very thing that is everywhere on the spread. The light of intellect is emerging from the laboratory and the dissecting-room, where it had its birth, and is gilding, with its clear rays, the dinner-table, and even the ball-room. A freer, a truer, and a grander view of things, seems to me to be rapidly dawning on the world.’

‘ I fear, my dear sir,’ said Mr. Luke, ‘ that these pleasing opinions of yours will not bear testing.’

‘ Do you mean,’ said Mr. Stockton, ‘ that society as a rule is not infinitely better informed now than it was thirty years ago ? Has it not infinitely fewer prejudices and infinitely more knowledge ?’

‘ We should look to the effects of the knowledge, not to the knowledge itself,’ said Mr. Luke. ‘ We cannot test the health of a society from looking over its examination papers in physical science.’

‘ How would you test it ?’ said Mr. Stockton, with a slight curl of the lip.

‘There are many tests,’ said Mr. Luke. ‘Here is one, amongst the very subjects that Mr. Laurence has ordered us to talk about—art and literature.’

‘I accept the test,’ said Mr. Stockton. ‘What, then, can be nobler than much modern poetry? There is some that I look upon as quite of the highest order.’

‘When I spoke of our literature,’ said Mr. Luke loftily, ‘I was not thinking of poetry. We have no poetry now.’

‘Indeed?’ said Mr. Stockton; ‘I imagined you had written some yourself.’

‘Ah!’ exclaimed Mr. Luke, drawing a long sigh, ‘I once knew what Goethe calls “the divine worth of tone and tears.” But my own poems only prove the truth of what I say. They could only have been written in evil days. They were simply a wail of pain; and now that I am grown braver, I keep silence. Poetry in some ages is an expression of the best strength; in an age like ours it is the disguise of the worst weakness—or, when not that, it is simply a forced plant, an exotic. No, Mr. Stockton, I was not speaking of our poetry, but of the one kind of imaginative literature that is the natural growth of our own day, the novel. Now, the novel itself is a plant which, when it grows abundantly and

alone, you may be sure is a sign of a poor soil. But don't trust to that only. Look at our novels themselves, and see what sort of life it is they image—the trivial interests, the contemptible incidents, the absurdity of the virtuous characters, the viciousness of the characters who are not absurd. Spain was in some ways worse in Cervantes' time than England is in ours; but you may search all our novels for one character that has one tithe of Don Quixote's heroism, for one of our sane men that breathed in so healthy and pure an atmosphere as the inspired madman. And this is not from want of ability on the novelist's part. Some of them have powers enough and to spare; but the best novels only reflect back most clearly the social anarchy, and the bad ones are unconscious parts of it.'

'And as for our painting,' said Mr. Herbert, 'that reflects, even more clearly than our literature, our hideous and our hopeless degradation. The other day, when I walked through the Royal Academy, my mind was literally dazzled by the infernal glare of corruption and vulgarity that was flashed upon me from every side. There were, indeed, only two pictures in the whole collection that were not entirely abominable;

and these were, one of them three boulders in the island of Sark, the other a study of pebbles on the beach at Ilfracombe.'

'I know little about the technicalities of art,' said Mr. Stockton, 'so I will not presume to dispute this point with you.'

'Well,' said Leslie, 'here is another test quite as good as art and literature—love and money, and their relations in our days.'

He would have continued speaking; but Mr. Herbert allowed him no time.

'The very things,' he said, 'I was about to touch upon—the very things the pictures the other day suggested to me. For, seeing how the work of the painter becomes essentially vile so soon as it becomes essentially venal, I was reminded of the like corruption of what is far more precious than the work of any painter—our own English girls, who are prepared for the modern marriage-market on precisely the same principles as our pictures for the Royal Academy. There is but one difference. The work of the modern painter is vile from its very beginning—in its conception and execution alike; but our girls we receive, in the first instance, entirely fair and sacred from the hands of God himself, clothed upon with a lovelier vesture than any lilies of the field——'

‘Really,’ whispered Lady Ambrose to Laurence, ‘Providence has done so very little for us, as far as vesture goes.’

‘——And we,’ Mr. Herbert went on, ‘with unspeakable profanity presume to dress and to decorate them, till the heavenly vesture is entirely hidden, thinking, like a modern Simon Magus, that the gifts of God are to be purchased for money, and not caring to perceive that, if they are to be purchased with the devil’s money, we must first convert them into the devil’s gifts.’

‘Yes,’ said Mrs. Sinclair, with a faint smile, ‘the day for love-matches is quite gone over now.’

But her words were drowned by Mr. Saunders, who exclaimed at the top of his voice, and in a state of great excitement, ‘Electric telegraphs—railways—steam printing presses—let me beg of you to consider the very next subject set for us—riches and civilisation—and to judge of the present generation by the light of that.’

‘I have considered them,’ said Mr. Herbert, ‘for the last thirty years—and with inexpressible melancholy.’

‘I conceive,’ said Mr. Saunders, ‘that you are somewhat singular in your feelings.’

‘I am,’ replied Mr. Herbert; ‘and that in most of my opinions and feelings I am singular, is a fact fraught for me with the most ominous significance. Yet, how could I—who think that health is more than wealth, and who hold it a more important thing to separate right from wrong than to identify men with monkeys—how could I hope to be anything but singular in a generation that deliberately, and with its eyes open, prefers a cotton-mill to a Titian?’

‘I hold it,’ said Mr. Saunders, ‘to be one of the great triumphs of our day, that it has so subordinated all the vaguer and more lawless sentiments to the solid guidance of sober economical considerations. And not only do I consider a cotton-mill, but I consider even a good sewer, to be a far nobler and a far holier thing—for holy in reality does but mean healthy—than the most admired Madonna ever painted.’

‘A good sewer,’ said Mr. Herbert, ‘is, I admit, an entirely holy thing; and would all our manufacturers and men of science bury themselves underground, and confine their attention to making sewers, I, for one, should have little complaint against them.’

‘And are railways, telegraphs, gas-lamps—is the projected Channel tunnel, nothing in

your eyes? Is it nothing that all the conditions of life are ameliorated, that mind is daily pursuing farther its conquest over matter?’

‘Have we much to thank you for,’ said Mr. Herbert, ‘that you have saved us from an hour of sea-sickness, if in return you give us a whole lifetime of heart-sickness? Your mind, my good sir, that you boast of, is so occupied in subduing matter, that it is entirely forgetful of subduing itself—a matter, trust me, that is far more important. And as for your amelioration of the conditions of life—that is not civilisation which saves a man from the need of exercising any of his powers, but which obliges him to exert his noble powers; not that which satisfies his lower feelings with the greatest ease, but which provides satisfaction for his higher feelings, no matter at what trouble.’

‘Other things being equal,’ said Mr. Saunders, ‘I apprehend that the generation that travels sixty miles an hour is at least five times as civilised as the generation that travels only twelve.’

‘But the other things are *not* equal,’ said Mr. Herbert: ‘and the other things, by which I suppose you mean all that is really sacred in the life of man, have been banished or

buried by the very things which we boast of as our civilisation.'

'That is our own fault,' said Mr. Saunders, 'not the fault of civilisation.'

'Not so,' said Mr. Herbert. 'Bring up a boy to do nothing for himself—make everything easy for him—to use your own expression, subdue matter for him—and that boy will never be able to subdue anything for himself. He will be weak in body, and a coward in soul——'

'Precisely,' said Mr. Saunders. 'And that is really, if you look dispassionately at the matter, a consummation devoutly to be wished. For why do we need our bodies to be strong?—To overcome obstacles. Why do we need to be brave?—To attack enemies. But by and by, when all our work is done by machinery, and we have no longer any obstacles to overcome, or any hardships to endure, strength will become useless, and bravery dangerous. And my own hope is that both will have ere long vanished; and that weakness and cowardice, qualities which we now so irrationally despise, will have vindicated their real value, by turning universal civilisation into universal peace.'

'Yes,' said Mr. Herbert, 'that is exactly what the modern world is longing for—a

universal peace; which never can nor will mean anything else than peace with the devil.'

'Really,' said Lady Ambrose to Leslie, 'do you think we are in such a bad way as all this? Dr. Jenkinson, I must ask you—you always know these things—do you think we are so very bad?'

'Yes—yes,' said the Doctor, turning towards her with a cheerful smile, 'there is a great deal that is very bad in our own days—very bad indeed. Many thoughtful people think that there is more that is bad in the present than there has ever been in the past. Many thoughtful people in all days have thought the same.'

'Whenever wise men,' said Herbert, 'have taken to thinking about their own times, it is quite true that they have always thought ill of them. But that is because the times must have gone wrong before the wise men take to the business of thinking about them at all. We are never conscious of our constitutions till they are out of order.'

'Ah! yes,' said Mr. Luke; 'how true that is, Herbert! Philosophy may be a golden thing. But it is the gold of the autumn woods, that soon falls, and leaves the boughs of the nation naked.'

‘Yes,’ said Leslie, ‘leaving nothing but
Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.’

‘Thank you, Mr. Leslie,’ exclaimed Mr. Herbert across the table, ‘thank you—an exquisitely apt quotation.’

‘Then you, Mr. Leslie,’ said Lady Ambrose in a disappointed voice, ‘you are one of these desponding people too, are you? I never heard anything so dismal in my life.’

‘I certainly think,’ said Leslie, ‘that our age in some ways could not possibly be worse. Nobody knows what to believe, and most people believe nothing. Don’t you find that?’

‘Indeed I do not,’ said Lady Ambrose, with some vigour, ‘and I am very sorry for those who do. That Mr. Saunders,’ she added, lowering her voice, ‘is the first person I ever heard express such views. We were dining only the other day with the Bishop of —, and I’ll tell you what he said, Mr. Leslie. He said that the average number of churches built yearly during the last ten years was greater than it had ever been since the Reformation. That does not look as if religion was on the decline, does it? I know the Bishop spoke of a phase of infidelity that was passing over the nation: but that, he

said, would soon have drifted by. Indeed, he told us that all the teachings of modern irreligious science were simply reproductions of—you must not laugh at me if I say the names wrong—Epicurus and Democritus—which had been long ago refuted. And that was no peculiar crotchet of his own mind ; for a very clever gentleman who was sitting next me said that that was the very thing which all the bishops agreed in saying—almost the only thing indeed in which they did agree.’

‘Ah!’ said Leslie, ‘materialism once came to the world like a small street boy throwing mud at it ; and the indignant world very soon drove it away. But it has now come back again, dirtier than ever, bringing a big brother with it, and Heaven knows when we shall get rid of it now.’

‘In every state of transition,’ said Dr. Jenkinson to Miss Merton, ‘there must always be much uneasiness. But I don’t think,’ he said, with a little pleased laugh, ‘that you will find these times really much worse than those that went before them. No—no. If we look at them soberly, they are really a great deal better. We have already got rid of a vast amount of superstition and ignorance, and are learning what Christianity really is. We are learning true reverence—

that is, not to dogmatise about subjects of which we cannot possibly know anything.

‘Just so, Jenkinson,’ said Mr. Luke; ‘that is the very thing I am trying to teach the world myself. Personal immortality, for instance, which forms no part of the sweet secret of authentic Christianity——’

‘Yes—yes,’ said the Doctor hastily; ‘the Church had degraded the doctrine. It needed to be expressed anew.’

‘Of course,’ said Miss Merton, ‘I, as a Catholic——’

‘Dear! dear!’ exclaimed the Doctor, in some confusion, ‘I beg your pardon. I had no notion you were a Roman Catholic.’

‘I was going to say,’ Miss Merton went on, ‘that, though of course as a Catholic I am not without what I believe to be an infallible guide, I feel just as much as anyone the bad state in which things are now. It is so difficult to shape one’s course in life. One has nowhere any work cut out for one. There is a want of—well——’ she said, smiling, ‘of what perhaps, when religion has been analysed by science, will be called moral ozone in the air.’

‘Such a feeling is not unnatural,’ said the Doctor; ‘but you will find it vanish if you just resolve cheerfully to go on doing the

duty next you—even if this be only to order dinner. And,' he said, turning to her rather abruptly, 'don't despond over the times: that only makes them worse. Besides, they are not really at all bad. There is no need for desponding at all.'

'But there is at least excuse,' said Laurence, 'when we see all the old faiths, the old ideas, under which the world has so long found shelter, fading

Like the baseless fabric of a vision,
rapidly and for ever away from us.'

'I don't think so,' said the Doctor, as if that settled the question.

'Christianity,' said Mr. Stockton, 'is only retiring to make way for something better. Religions are not quickened unless they perish. Look forward at the growing brightness of the future, not at the faded brightness of the past.'

'Why not look at the present?' said Dr. Jenkinson. 'Depend upon it, it is not wise to be above one's times. There's plenty of religion now. The real power of Christianity is growing every day, even where you least expect it.'

'In what part of Christianity,' said Leslie, 'its real power lies, it would be unbecoming in

me to profess that I know. But this I do know, that if you take four out of five of the more thoughtful and instructed men of the day, you will find that not only have they no faith in a personal God or a personal immortality, but the very notions of such things seem to them absurdities.'

'Yes,' said Mr. Herbert, 'it was once thought a characteristic of the lowest savages to be without a belief in a future life. It will soon be thought a characteristic of the lowest savages to be with one.'

'Really now—' said Mr. Luke, in a voice whose tone seemed to beseech everyone to be sensible, 'personal immortality and a personal Deity are no doctrines of Christianity. You, Jenkinson, I know agree with me.'

There was nothing the Doctor so disliked as these appeals from Mr. Luke. He made in this case no response whatever. He turned instead to Miss Merton.

'You see,' he said to her in a very quiet but very judicial way, 'the age we live in is an age of change. And in all such ages there must be many things that, if we let them, will pain and puzzle us. But we mustn't let them. There have been many ages of change before our time, and there are sure to be many after it. Our age is not peculiar.'

Here he paused, as he had a way of doing at times between his sentences. This practice now, as it had often been before, was of a disservice to him; for it gave a fatal facility for interruption when he could least have wished it. In this case Leslie entirely put him out, by attacking the very statement which the Doctor least of all had designed to bear question.

‘But in some ways,’ said Leslie, ‘this age is peculiar, surely. It is peculiar in the extraordinary rapidity of its changes. Christianity took three hundred years to supplant polytheism; atheism has hardly taken thirty to supplant Christianity.’

Dr. Jenkinson did not deign to take the least notice of this.

‘I suppose,’ said Miss Merton to Leslie, ‘that you think Catholicism quite a thing of the past?’

‘I’m afraid,’ said Leslie, ‘that my opinion on that is of very small importance. But, however that may be, you must admit that in the views of the world at large there have been great changes; and these, I say, have come on us with so astonishing a quickness that they have plunged us into a state of mental anarchy that has not been equalled since mental order has been known. There is no recognised rule of life anywhere. The old

rules only satisfy those who are not capable of feeling the need of any rule at all. Every one who does right at all only does what is right in his own eyes. All society, it seems, is going to pieces.'

'I,' said Mr. Rose, 'look upon social dissolution as the true condition of the most perfect life. For the centre of life is the individual, and it is only through dissolution that the individual can re-emerge. All the warrings of endless doubts, all the questionings of matter and of spirit, which I have myself known, I value only because, remembering the weariness of them, I take a profounder and more exquisite pleasure in the colour of a crocus, the pulsations of a chord of music, or a picture of Sandro Botticelli's.'

Mr. Rose's words hardly produced all the effect he could have wished; for the last part was almost drowned in the general rustle of the ladies rising.

'Before we go, Mr. Laurence,' said Lady Ambrose, 'will you be good enough to tell me the history of these salt-cellars? I wanted to have asked you at the beginning of dinner, but you made yourself so very appalling then, that I really did not venture.'

‘Well,’ said Laurence, ‘no doubt they surprise you. They were a present made to me the other day by a friend of mine—an eminent man of science, and are models of a peculiar kind of retort he has invented, for burning human bodies, and turning them into gas.’

‘Good gracious!’ said Lady Ambrose, ‘how horrible! I insist, Mr. Laurence, on your having another set to-morrow night—remember.’

‘There,’ said Laurence, when the gentlemen had resettled themselves, and had begun their wine, ‘there is the new version of the skeleton at the banquet-board—the two handfuls of white dust, to which we, the salt of the earth, shall one day crumble. Let us sacrifice all the bulls we have to *Pluto illacrimabilis*—let us sacrifice ourselves to one another, or to Heaven—to this favour must we come. Is not that so, Mr. Storcks?’

‘Laurence,’ said Dr. Jenkinson briskly, ‘the conversation hasn’t kept pace with the dinner. We have got no farther than “The Present” yet. The ladies are going to talk of “The Future” by themselves. See—there they are out on the terrace.’

Mr. Storcks here drew his chair to the table, and cleared his throat.

‘It is easier,’ he said, ‘to talk about the present now we are alone—now *they*,’ he nodded his head in the direction of the party outside, ‘are gone out to talk about the future in the moonlight. There are many things which even yet it does not do to say before women—at least, before all women.’

‘My aunt,’ said Laurence, ‘is a great authority on woman’s education and true position; and she has written an essay to advance the female cause.’

‘Indeed?’ said Mr. Storcks; ‘I was not aware of that. I shall look forward with much pleasure to some conversation with her. But what I was going to say related to the present, which at dinner was on all sides so mercilessly run down. I was going to claim for the present age, in thought and speculation (and it is these that give their tone to its entire conduct of life), as its noble and peculiar feature, a universal, intrepid, dogged resolve to find out and face the complete truth of things, and to allow no prejudice, however dear to us, to obscure our vision. This is the only real morality: and not only is it full of blessing for the future, but it is giving us “manifold more in this present time” as well. The work of science, you

see, is twofold ; it enlarges the horizon of the mind, and improves the conditions of the body. If you will pardon my saying so, Mr. Herbert, I think your antipathy to science must be due to your not having fully appreciated its true work and dignity.'

'The work of science is, I know, twofold,' said Mr. Herbert, 'speculative and practical.'

'Exactly so,' said Mr. Storcks approvingly.

'And all it can do for us in speculation,' said Mr. Herbert, 'is to teach us that we have no life hereafter : all it can do for us in practice, is to ruin our life here. It enervates us by providing us with base luxury ; it degrades us by turning our attention to base knowledge.'

'No—no,' said Dr. Jenkinson, with one of his little laughs, 'not that. I don't think, Mr. Storcks, that Mr. Herbert always quite means what he says. We mustn't take him at his word.'

'My dear sir,' said Mr. Herbert, turning to the Doctor, 'you are a consecrated priest of the mystical Church of Christ'—Dr. Jenkinson winced terribly at this—'and let me ask you if you think it the work of Christ to bring into men's minds eternal corruption,

instead of eternal life—or, rather, not corruption, I should say, but putrefaction. For what is putrefaction but decomposition? And at the touch of science all our noblest ideas decompose and putrefy, till our whole souls are strewn with dead hopes and dead religions, with corpses of all the thoughts we loved

Quickening slowly into lower forms.

You may call it analysis, but I call it death.'

'I wish we could persuade you,' said Mr. Stockton, very temperately, 'to take a fairer view of things. Surely truth cannot in the long run be anything but life-giving.'

'Let us take care of facts,' said Mr. Storks, 'and fictions—I beg your pardon, religion—will take care of itself.'

'And religion,' said Mr. Stockton, 'will take care of itself very well. Of course we don't waste time now in thinking about personal immortality. *We* shall not live; but the mind of man will; and religion will live too, being part of the mind of man. Religion is, indeed, to the inner world what the sky is to the outer. It is the mind's canopy—the infinite mental azure in which the mysterious source of our being is at once revealed and hidden. Let us beware, then, of not considering religion noble; but let us beware still more of

considering it true. We may fancy that we trace in the clouds shapes of real things ; and, as long as we know that this is only fancy, I know of no holier occupation for the human mind than such cloud-gazing. But let us always recollect that the cloud which to us may seem shaped like a son of man, may seem to another to be backed like a weasel, and to another to be very like a whale. What, then,' Mr. Stockton added, 'can be a nobler study than the great book of Nature, or, as we used to call it, the works of God?'

'Pray do not think,' said Mr. Herbert, 'that I complain of this generation because it studies Nature. I complain of it because it does not study her. Yes,' he went on, as he saw Mr. Stockton start, 'you can analyse her in your test tubes, you can spy at her through your microscopes ; but can you see her with your own eyes, or receive her into your own souls ? You can tell us what she makes her wonders of, and how she makes them, and how long she takes about it. But you cannot tell us what these wonders are like when they are made. When God said, "Let there be light, and light was, and God saw that it was good," was he thinking, as he saw this, of the exact velocity it travelled at, and of the exact laws it travelled by, which you wise

men are at such infinite pains to discover ; or was he thinking of something else, which you take no pains to discover at all—of how it clothed the wings of the morning with silver, and the feathers of the evening with gold ? Is water, think you, a nobler thing to the modern chemist, who can tell you exactly what gases it is made of, and nothing more ; or to Turner, who could not tell you at all what it is made of, but who did know and who could tell you what it is made—what it is made by the sunshine, and the cloud-shadow, and the storm-wind—who knew how it paused in the taintless mountain trout-pool, a living crystal over stones of flickering amber ; and how it broke itself turbid, with its choirs of turbulent thunder, when the rocks card it into foam, and where the tempest sifts it into spray ? When Pindar called water the best of things, was he thinking of it as the union of oxygen and hydrogen——’

‘ He would have been much wiser if he had been,’ interposed Dr. Jenkinson. ‘ Thales, to whose theory, as you know, Pindar was referring——’ But the Doctor’s words were utterly unavailing to check the torrent of Mr. Herbert’s eloquence. They only turned it into a slightly different course.

‘ Ah ! masters of modern science,’ he went

on, 'you can tell us what pure water is made of; but, thanks to your drains and your mills, you cannot tell us where to find it. You can, no doubt, explain to us all about sunsets; but the smoke of your towns and your factories has made it impossible for us to see one. However, each generation is wise in its own wisdom; and ours would sooner look at a fœtus in a bottle, than at a statue of the god Apollo, from the hand of Phidias, and in the air of Athens.'

During all this speech Mr. Storcks had remained with his face buried in his hands, every now and then drawing in his breath through his teeth, as if he were in pain. When it was over he looked up with a scared expression, as if he hardly knew where he was, and seemed quite unable to utter a syllable.

'Of course,' said Mr. Stockton, 'mere science, as science, does not deal with moral right and wrong.'

'No,' said Mr. Saunders, 'for it has shown that right and wrong are terms of a bygone age, connoting altogether false ideas. Mere automata as science shows we are—clockwork machines, wound up by meat and drink——'

'As for that,' broke in Mr. Storcks, who

had by this time recovered himself—and his weighty voice at once silenced Mr. Saunders, ‘I would advise our young friend not to be too confident. We may be automata, or we may not. Science has not yet decided. And upon my word,’ he said, striking the table, ‘I don’t myself care which we are. Supposing the Deity—if there be one—should offer to make me a machine, if I am not one, on condition that I should always go right, I, for one, would gladly close with the proposal.’

‘But you forget,’ said Allen, ‘that in the moral sense there would be no going right at all, if there were not also the possibility of going wrong. If your watch keeps good time you don’t call it virtuous, nor if it keeps bad time do you call it sinful.’

‘Sin, Lord Allen,’ said Mr. Storke, ‘is a word that has helped to retard moral and social progress more than anything. Nothing is good or bad, but thinking makes it so; and the superstitious and morbid way in which a number of entirely innocent things have been banned as sin, has caused more than half the tragedies of the world. Science will establish an entirely new basis of morality; and the sunlight of rational approbation will shine on many a thing, hitherto

overshadowed by the curse of a hypothetical God.'

'Exactly so,' exclaimed Mr. Saunders eagerly. 'Now, I'm not at all that sort of man myself,' he went on, 'so don't think it because I say this.'

Everyone stared at Mr. Saunders in wonder as to what he could mean.

'We think it, for instance,' he said, 'a very sad thing when a girl is as we call it ruined. But it is we really that make all the sadness. She is ruined only because we think she is so. And I have little doubt that that higher philosophy of the future that Mr. Storcks speaks of will go far, some day, towards solving the great question of women's sphere of action, by its recognition of prostitution as an honourable and beneficent profession.'

'Sir!' exclaimed Mr. Storcks, striking the table, and glaring with indignation at Mr. Saunders, 'I could hardly have believed that such misplaced flippancy——'

'Flippancy! it is reasoned truth,' shrieked Mr. Saunders, upsetting his wine-glass.

Luckily this brought about a pause. Laurence took advantage of it.

'See,' he said, 'Dr. Jenkinson has left us. Will no one have any more wine?—Then suppose we follow him.'

CHAPTER IV.

IT was a calm, lovely evening. The moon was rising over the sea, and the sea was slowly silvering under it. A soft breeze breathed gently, full of the scents of flowers; and in the low sky of the west there yet lingered a tender peach-colour.

The ladies were sitting about on chairs, grouped together, but with several little groups within the group; and amongst them all was Dr. Jenkinson, making himself particularly agreeable to Mrs. Sinclair. When the gentlemen emerged there was a general stir, and Lady Ambrose, shutting up a volume of St.-Simon's Memoirs, said, 'Well, Mr. Laurence, we have been talking most industriously about the future.'

Laurence was standing with Mr. Luke on the step of the dining-room window, and both were looking out gravely on the tranquil scene.

'Do you remember,' said Laurence, 'that

it was here, three years ago, that you composed the lines that stand last in your published volumes ?’

‘I remember,’ said Mr. Luke dreamily. ‘What an evening that was !’

‘I wish you would repeat them,’ said Laurence.

‘What is the good ?’ said Mr. Luke ; ‘why rouse again the voices that haunt

About the mouldered lodges of the past ?’

‘Mr. Luke,’ said Lady Ambrose appealingly, ‘I do so wish you would.’

‘Is Mr. Luke going to recite poetry ?’ said Mrs. Sinclair, coming languidly up to them. ‘How delicious !’ She was looking lovely in the dim light, with a diamond star shining in her dark hair ; and for a mortal bard there was positively no resisting her appeal.

Mr. Luke, with a silent composure, pressed his hands for a moment against his forehead ; he gave one hem ; and then in a clear melodious voice began as follows :—

*‘Softly the evening descends,
Violet and soft. The sea
Adds to the silence, below
Pleasant and cool on the beach
Breaking ; yes, and a breeze
Calm as the twilight itself
Furtively sighs through the dusk,*

*Listlessly lifting my hair,
Fanning my thought-wearied brow.*

*Thus I stand in the gloom
Watching the moon-track begin
Quivering to die like a dream
Over the far sea-line
To the unknown region beyond.*

*'So for ages hath man
Gazed on the ocean of time
From the shores of his birth, and, turning
His eyes from the quays, the thronged
Marts, the noise and the din
To the far horizon, hath dreamed
Of a timeless country beyond.*

*Vainly: for how should he pass,
Being on foot, o'er the wet
Ways of the unplumbed waves?
How, without ship, should he pass
Over the shipless sea
To the timeless country beyond?*

*'Ah, but once—once long ago,
Came there a ship white-sailed
From the country beyond, with bright
Oarsmen, and men that sang;
Came to Humanity's coasts,
Called to the men on the shore,
Joyously touched at the port.*

*Then did time-weary man
Climb the bulwarks, the deck
Eagerly crowding. Anon
With jubilant voices raised,
And singing, "When Israel came
Out of Egypt," and whatso else*

*In the psalm is written, they passed
Out of the ken of the land,
Over the far sea-line,
To the unknown region beyond.*

*'Where are they now, then—they
That were borne out of sight by the ship—
Our brothers, of times gone by?
Why have they left us here
Solemn, dejected, alone,
Gathered in groups on the shore?
Why? For we, too, have gazed
O'er the waste of waters, and watched
For a sail as keenly as they.
Ah, wretched men that we are!
On our haggard faces and brows
Aching, a wild breeze fawns
Full of the scents of the sea,
Redolent of regions beyond.
Why, then, tarries the ship?
When will her white sail rise
Like a star on the sea-line? When?*

*'When?—And the answer comes
From the sailless face of the sea,
"Ah, vain watchers, what boots
The calm of the evening?
Have ye not watched through the day
Turbulent waves, the expanse
Endless, shaken with storm,
And ask ye where is the ship?
Deeper than plummet can dive
She is bedded deep in the ooze,
And over her tall mast floats
The purple plain of the calm."*

*'Yes—and never a ship
 Since this is sunken, will come
 Ever again o'er the waves—
 Nay, not even the craft with the fierce
 Steersman, him of the marsh
 Livid, with wheels of flame
 Circling his eyes, to smite
 The lingering soul with his oar.
 —Not that even. But we
 Drop where we stand one by one
 On the shingles and sands of time,
 And cover in taciturn gloom,
 With only perhaps some tear,
 Each for his brother the hushed
 Heart and the limitless dreams
 With a little gift of sand.'*

Thank you, Mr. Luke, so much,' said Lady Ambrose. 'How charming! I am always so fond of poems about the sea.'

'Ah,' said Mr. Luke, turning to Mrs. Sinclair, 'these are emotions scarcely worth describing.'

'Certainly not,' muttered Mr. Storke, half aloud as he moved off to discover Lady Grace.

Mr. Luke stood apart, and surveyed the party with a look of pensive pity. On Mr. Storke, however, whose last remark he had overheard, his eyes rested with an expression somewhat more contemptuous. The brightening moonlight fell softly on the group

before him, giving it a particularly picturesque effect, as it touched the many colours and folds of the ladies' dresses, and struck here and there a furtive flash from a gem on wrist or throat. The tranquil hour seemed to have a tranquillising effect on nearly everyone; and the conversation reached Mr. Luke's ears as a low murmur, broken only by the deep sound of Mr. Storke's voice, and the occasional high notes of Mr. Saunders, who seemed to Mr. Luke, in his present frame of mind, to be like a shrill cock crowing to the world before the sunrise of universal philistinism.

Laurence meanwhile had caught Miss Merton's eyes looking at him with a grave regard; and this had brought him instantly to her side, when Mr. Luke had ended his recital.

'We didn't spare the times we live in, to-night, did we?' he said slowly to her in a low voice. 'Well, well—I wonder what it is all coming to—we and our times together! We are certainly a curious medley here, all of us. I suppose no age but ours could have produced one like it—at least, let us hope so, for the credit of the ages in general.'

'I must say,' said Miss Merton, smiling, 'that you seem to take to the age very kindly,

and to be very happy amongst your friends. But you did not tell us very much of what you thought yourself.'

'I don't often say what I think,' said Laurence, 'because I don't often know what I think ; but I know a great many things that I don't think ; and I confess I take a pleasure in saying these, and in hearing others say them ; so the society that I choose as a rule represents not the things I think I approve, but the things I am sure I repudiate.'

'I confess,' said Miss Merton, 'I don't quite understand that.'

'Shall I tell you,' said Laurence, 'why I live so much in society—amongst my friends, as you call them ? Simply because I feel, in my life, as a child does in a dark room ; and I must have some one to talk to, or else I think I should go mad. What one says is little matter, so long as one makes a noise of some sort, and forgets the ghosts that in one's heart one is shuddering at.'

Miss Merton was silent for a moment, and looked up into the sky in which the stars were now one by one appearing.

'I suppose,' she said presently, 'you think it is a very poor affair—life's whole business. And yet I don't see why you should.'

'Not see why I should ?' repeated

Laurence. 'Ah, that shows how little you, from your position, can sympathise with ours. I am not surprised at it. Of course, it is out of the question that you should. You, happy in some sustaining faith, can see a meaning in all life, and all life's affections. You can endure—you can even welcome its sorrows. The clouds of *ennui* themselves for you have silver linings. For your religion is a kind of philosopher's stone, turning whatever it touches into something precious. But we—we can only remember that for us, too, things had a meaning once; but they have it no longer. Life stares at us now, all blank and expressionless, like the eyes of a lost friend, who is not dead, but who has turned an idiot. Perhaps you never read Clough's Poems, did you? Scarcely a day passes in which I do not echo to myself his words:—

Ah well-a-day, for we are souls bereaved!

Of all the creatures under heaven's wide cope,
We are most hopeless who had once most hope,
And most beliefless who had once believed.'

'And do you think,' said Miss Merton in a low tone, 'that belief in these days brings no painful perplexities too? Do you think that we can look out on the state of the world now, and think about its future, without anxiety? But really,' she went on, raising her

voice, 'if I, like you, thought that Christianity was not true, I should not waste my time in lamenting over it. I should rather be glad that I had got free from a gigantic and awful imposition.'

'What!' exclaimed Laurence, 'should we rejoice at our old guide dropping dead amongst the mountains, even though he had lost his way; if so we are left hopeless, and without any guide at all?'

'You have your consciences,' said Miss Merton, with some decision in her voice; 'you surely don't mean to say that you have lost them?'

'As for our consciences,' said Leslie, who was standing close by, 'we revere them so much that we fancy they possess some power. But conscience, in most souls, is like an English Sovereign—it reigns, but it does not govern. Its function is merely to give a formal assent to the Bills passed by the passions; and it knows, if it opposes what those are really bent upon, that ten to one it will be obliged to abdicate.'

'Let us hope that the constitutions of most souls are more stable than that,' said Miss Merton. 'As far as morality goes, I expect you have quite enough to guide you; and if you think religion false, I don't see why

its loss should trouble you. And life itself, remember, has plenty of pleasures. It is full of things worth living for.'

'Is it?' exclaimed Leslie with sudden emphasis, and he looked into Miss Merton's face with an expression half absent and half wondering. 'Is there anything in life that you really think is, for its own sake, worth living for? To me it seems that we are haunted with the power of imagining that there might be, and are pursued with the knowledge that there never is. Look at that lovely water before us, with its floods of moonlight—how it ripples, how it sparkles away into the distance! What happiness sights like these suggest to one! How happy they might make us—might, but they never do! They only madden us with a vague pain, that is like the sense of something lost for ever.'

'Still,' said Miss Merton, 'life is not all moonlight. Surely friendship and affection are worth having?'

'Let me beg you, Miss Merton,' said Leslie, replying to her tone rather than to her words, 'not to think that I am always pining and bemoaning myself. Fortunately the deeper part of one's nature will often go to sleep, and then the surface can enjoy itself. We can even laugh with our lips at the very things

that our hearts in silence are breaking for. But as for happiness, that is always like prophecy, it is only fulfilled in the future ; or else it is a miracle—it only exists in the past. The actual things we wish for we may very likely get, but they always come too late or too soon. When the boy is in love, he tries to feel like a man ; when the man is in love, he tries to feel like a boy ; and both in vain.'

' Ah,' exclaimed Laurence, ' I think very differently from that. I know,' he said, turning to Miss Merton, ' that friendship and affection are things worth having ; and if only pain and anxiety would leave me, I could enjoy the taste of happiness.'

' Could you ?' said Leslie. ' When I look at what we are and what the world is, I can fancy no more melancholy spectacle than a happy man ; though I admit,' he added as he moved slowly away, ' that there is none more amusing than a man who tries to be melancholy.'

' Leslie is oddly changed,' said Laurence, ' since I saw him last. *I* am distressed with life because I cannot find out its worth. *He* is indignant at it, it seems, because he thinks he has found out its worthlessness. And yet—I envy him his temperament. He never lets any melancholy subdue him. He can always

laugh it down in a moment ; and he will trample bravely on any of his sentiments if he is on the road to anything he is proud of aiming at.'

Laurence was silent for a moment, and then said abruptly :—

'I dare say you think me very morbid ; but perhaps you can hardly realise the intense restless misery that a man endures when he can find nothing to do which he really feels worth doing. Could I only find some one thing— one great cause to labour for—one great idea—I could devote my whole self to it, and be happy : for labour, after all, is the only thing that never palls on a man. But such a cause, such an idea—I can find it nowhere. Politics have turned into a petty, weary game ; religion is dead. Our new prophets only offer us Humanity, in place of the God of which they have deprived us. And Humanity makes a very poor Deity, since it is every day disgracing itself, and is never of the same mind from one week's end to another. And so here I am utterly alone—friendless, and with nothing to help me ; feeling that, were it not for the petty contemptible interests I manufacture for myself from day to day, life would be quite unbearable.'

'And yet,' said Miss Merton, 'you have

much to make you happy—much that you would be sorry to lose.’

‘I have a certain position,’ said Laurence, ‘and a certain amount of wealth, and I would not willingly lose anything of either of these; but that is not because, in my heart, I value them; but because, if I lost them, I might in my heart cease to despise them.’

‘Surely,’ said Miss Merton, ‘there is a better way of looking at the matter. You came into the world with all your lower ambitions satisfied for you. The ground therefore is quite clear for the higher ambitions. That is why I think an aristocracy, as a rule, must always be the best governors of men, for their ambitions, as a rule, are the only genuine ones. Think, too, what an advantage mere wealth is. The highest labour will never produce money, but generally requires it.’

‘That is just the difficulty,’ said Laurence. ‘What shall I labour for? I am almost maddened sometimes, as I sit all the day idle, and seem to hear the hateful wasted moments slipping away from me. And I *could* do something, I am sure. I feel I have powers.’

‘I think,’ said Miss Merton, ‘that all I should say to you is, find something to do. The power to find or make an object is, I think, a great part of genius. However,’ she

said, with some sympathy in her voice, 'if you are in difficulties, I am sure I wish I could help you.'

'Well,' said Laurence in a subdued voice, 'I'm sure I beg your pardon for my egoism. I never talked so long about myself in my whole life before; and I promise never to do so again.'

Leslie meanwhile had moved away towards Mrs. Sinclair, who, looking particularly fascinating, was still commanding the attentions of Dr. Jenkinson. The Doctor was standing by her, all deferent gallantry, and, to Leslie's surprise, was saying something to her about Sappho.

'And now,' said Mrs. Sinclair, with a little appealing dainty smile, 'I want to ask you something about the Greek Anthology too. I can't read much Greek myself: but a gentleman who used to be rather kind to me, translated me a good deal of Greek poetry, once upon a time—when my husband,' she said, with a little shrug of the shoulders, 'used to go to sleep after his dinner.'

Dr. Jenkinson here glanced suspiciously at Mrs. Sinclair.

'Now, what I want you to tell me,' she said, 'is something about some little—ahem

—little love songs, I think they were—*έρωτικ*—something or other—I really can't pronounce the name.'

The Doctor started.

'And, Dr. Jenkinson, please,' Mrs. Sinclair went on in a voice of plaintive innocence, 'not to think me a terrible blue-stocking, because I ask you these questions; for I really hardly know any Greek myself—except perhaps a verse or two of the New Testament; and that's not very good Greek, I believe, is it? But the gentleman who translated so much to me, when he came to these little poems I speak of, was continually, though he was a very good scholar, quite unable to translate them. Now, why should that have been, I want to know? Are Greek love-poems very hard?'

'Well,' said the Doctor, stammering, yet re-assured by Mrs. Sinclair's manner, 'they were probably—your friend perhaps—well—they were a little obscure perhaps—much Greek is—or——'

'Corrupt?' suggested Mrs. Sinclair naïvely.

The word was a simple one: but it sufficed to work a miracle on Dr. Jenkinson. For the first time in his life to a lady who united the two charms of beauty and fashion,

to both of which he was eminently susceptible, Dr. Jenkinson was rude. He turned abruptly away, and staring hard at the moon, not at Mrs. Sinclair, said simply, 'I don't know,' with the most chilling intonation of which those words are capable. He then moved a pace away, and sat down on a chair close to Miss Merton.

Mrs. Sinclair turned to Leslie, with a flash in her eyes of soft suppressed laughter.

'How lovely the evening is!' murmured Leslie, responding to the smile.

'Yes,' said Mrs. Sinclair, looking out dreamily over the sea, 'it almost realises one's idea of perfect beauty.'

'Really, Mrs. Sinclair,' said Leslie, 'you are certainly most Hellenic. First you talk of Sappho, now of Ideas of Beauty. Are you a Platonist?'

'Mr. Leslie, of course I am,' said Mrs. Sinclair, somewhat misapprehending his meaning. 'I never heard such an impertinent question. Platonism, however, is a very rare philosophy in these days, I'm afraid.'

'Ah, and so you too think we are all of us very bad, do you?' said Leslie. 'It may be so, of course; and yet men at least often generalise very hastily and very wrongly, I am sure. How often, for instance, do we

say that all wives nowadays are inconstant, simply because such are the only ones we remember, not because they are the only ones we know.'

This speech was quite in Mrs. Sinclair's own manner, and she looked at Leslie with a smile of appreciation half humorous and half sentimental.

'Ah,' she began to say, in a voice that had just a touch of sadness in it, 'if we could but all of us love only when we ought, and where we ought—' But here she paused. Her voice died away, and she leaned her head upon her hand in silence.

Leslie was going to have spoken; but he was suddenly arrested by the sound of Dr. Jenkinson, close beside him, talking to Miss Merton in a tone of unusual earnestness.

'I don't wonder,' he was saying, 'that you should feel in perplexity sometimes; whichever way we look at things there will be perplexities. But there is such a thing as goodness; and goodness in the end must triumph, and so in this large faith let us rest.'

'And,' said Donald Gordon in his soft deferential voice, which always sounded as if he was saying something deeply devotional, 'don't you think it is a higher thing to be

good for good's own sake than for God's? and, whatever men may believe about having another life, and a beautiful heaven, with gold streets, and with jewelled fortifications, don't you think that morality really is after all its own reward?'

'But what of those poor people,' said Miss Merton, 'who cannot be moral—whom circumstances have kept from being ever anything but brutalised? I dare say,' she said, turning to the Doctor, quite forgetting his sacred character, 'that I shall hardly be able to make you understand such a notion as that of living for God's glory. But still, if there be not a God for whose glory we can live, and who in his turn will not leave us all to ourselves, what then? Think of all those who, in spite of hard surroundings, have just had strength enough to struggle to be good, but to struggle only—whose whole moral being has been left writhing in the road of life, like an animal that a cart-wheel has gone over, just lifting its eyes up with a piteous appeal at us who will not help it——'

Miss Merton looked at Dr. Jenkinson and paused. The moon shone tenderly on his silver hair, and his keen eyes had something very like moisture in them.

'Yes,' he said; 'these are great, great

difficulties. But there is another life in store for us—another life, and a God. And don't think that the world is growing to disbelieve in these. Remember how many intelligent laymen count themselves members of the Church of England, simply because they believe in these two doctrines.'

'It has always been inexplicable to me,' said Mr. Storke, who had been attracted by the sound of the Doctor's voice, 'whence this longing for a future life could have arisen. I suppose there are few things the very possibility of which science so conclusively disproves.'

'And yet,' said Laurence, who had been speaking for a moment to Mrs. Sinclair, 'I can't help thinking at certain times that there may be a whole world of things undreamed of by our scientific philosophy. Such a feeling is touched by the sight of an "Ora pro animâ meâ," or a "Resurgam," on a quiet tombstone, or the sign of the cross made by a mother in hope and in sorrow on the forehead of her dead child.'

Miss Merton looked at Laurence with some wonder in her large expressive eyes, Mr. Storke snorted, and Dr. Jenkinson blinked.

'See,' said Donald Gordon, 'the moonlight

grows brighter and brighter every moment. It is almost bewildering in its dazzling paleness.'

'And there,' said Laurence, 'do you catch it?—that is the light-ship on the horizon, like a large low star.'

Laurence seated himself on the balustrade, and, leaning on his elbow, looked up into the clear hollow skies.

'World upon world,' he exclaimed at last, 'and each one crowded, very likely, with beings like ourselves, wondering what this whole great universe is!'

'And the vast majority of them believing in a wise and just God,' said Leslie, 'for I see no reason why ours should be the stupidest world in all creation.'

'Yes,' said Laurence, 'and in each world a small select band, that has pierced through such a husk of lies, and has discovered the all-golden truth, that the universe is aimless, and that for good and evil the end is all one.'

Dr. Jenkinson had a sensible horror of the stars: and as soon as they were mentioned, he turned round in his chair, giving his back to the group, Miss Merton included; whilst Mr. Storke walked away, not without dignity.

‘Mrs. Sinclair is going to sing in a moment,’ said Laurence ; ‘some one is gone to fetch her guitar.’

‘Hush!’ exclaimed Miss Merton, ‘do just listen to this.’

‘Good gracious!’ said Laurence in a whisper, ‘Mr. Storcks is at my aunt at last.’

Mr. Storcks had been watching ever since dinner for an opportunity of discussing with Lady Grace the true position of woman, as settled by modern science. He was peculiarly full of this subject just now, having received only that morning a letter from a celebrated American physician, who stated very strongly as his opinion, that the strain of what is called the higher education was most prejudicial to the functions of maternity, and that the rights of woman might very probably be fatal to the existence of man. As soon as he got hold of Lady Grace, he led up to this point with startling rapidity ; having been perfectly charmed at starting to find that she fully agreed with him that the prejudices of the present day were doing more harm to woman’s true interests than anything else.

‘It is a pleasure,’ said Mr. Storcks, ‘to discuss these matters with a person so thoroughly

enlightened as yourself. You will of course see from what Dr. Boston says how entirely suicidal is the scheme of turning woman into a female man. Nature has marked out her mission for her plainly enough; and so our old friend Milton was right in his meaning after all, when he says that man is made for God, and woman for God through him, though of course the expression is antiquated.'

'Surely,' said Lady Grace with animation, 'not only the expression is antiquated, but the meaning also is contrary to all true fairness and enlightenment.'

'I confess, I don't see that,' said Mr. Storks with a look of smiling deference.

'What!' cried Lady Grace, 'is it not contrary to reason—let me put it to your own candour—for a man who knows that his wife, ages hence, will be a seraph singing before the throne of God, to consider her only made for God through him—to consider her, indeed, as a thing made simply for her husband's use?'

This answer of Lady Grace's took Mr. Storks quite aback. He knew not how to comport himself. His jaw fell—he stared—he said nothing. He felt as though he had been assassinated. But luckily at this very

moment, liquid and clear, and exquisitely modulated, were heard the sounds of Mrs. Sinclair's voice, singing the following song—

*Darling, can you endure the liquid weather,
The jasmine-scented twilights, oh my dear?
Or do you still remember how together
We read the sad sweet Idyll 'Guinevere,'
Love, in one last year's twilight?*
Galeotto fu il libro, e chi lo scrisse.¹

*Ah, the flowers smelt sweet, and all unheeding
Did I read to you that tender tale,
Oh my love, until my voice, in reading
How those lovers greeted 'passion-pale,'
Trembled in the soft twilight.*
Galeotto fu il libro, e chi lo scrisse.

*Then our eyes met, and then all was over—
All the world receded cold and far;
And your lips were on my lips, my lover;
And above us shook a silver star,
Through depths of melting twilight.*
Galeotto fu il libro, e chi lo scrisse.

*Darling, no July will ever find us
On this earth, together, more. Our fates
Were but a moment cheated. Then, behind us
Shrilled his voice for whom Caina² waits,
Shattering our one sweet twilight.*
Galeotto fu il libro, e chi lo scrisse.

¹ Dante, Inferno, v. 137.

² Ibid. v. 107.

*I shall know no more of summer weather,
Nought will be for me of glad or fair,
Till I join my darling, and together
We go for ever on the accursed air,¹
There in the dawnless twilight.*
Galeotto fu il libro, e chi lo scrisse.

‘What a lovely voice!’ said Laurence to Miss Merton. ‘I wonder how she will sound singing before the throne.’

‘She will be obliged to take lessons in a rather different style,’ said Miss Merton, unable to suppress a smile; and then she suddenly checked herself, and looked grave. ‘Mrs. Sinclair has always interested me,’ she said. ‘I often come across her in London, but I hardly know her.’

‘Mr. Laurence,’ said Mrs. Sinclair, ‘you must now make Mr. Leslie sing, for I discover that he can play the guitar too.’

Leslie was of course pressed, and with some reluctance consented.

‘I suppose,’ he said, ‘we are all of us more or less moon-struck to-night, so I had best sing the silliest thing I know; and as I don’t think anything can be sillier than a song I once wrote myself, I will sing that.’

He touched a few chords carelessly, and yet with the manner of a practised player;

¹ Dante, Inferno, v. 31.

paused for a moment, and then again striking the instrument began to sing. He was watched at first with merely a languid curiosity; and Miss Prattle whispered to Lady Ambrose that his attitude was very affected; but curiosity and criticism were both lost in surprise at the first sound of his rich and flexible voice, and still more so at the real passion which he breathed into the following words, rude and artless as they were:—

*Oh, her cheek, her cheek was pale,
Her voice was hardly musical;
But your proud grey eyes grew tender,
Child, when mine they met,
With a piteous self-surrender,
Margaret.*

*Child, what have I done to thee?
Child, what hast thou done to me?
How you froze me with your tone
That last day we met!
Your sad eyes then were cold as stone,
Margaret.*

*Oh, it all now seems to me
A far-off weary mystery!
Yet—and yet, her last sad frown
Awes me still, and yet—
In vain I laugh your memory down,
Margaret.*

Leslie received loud thanks from many


voices, especially from Lady Ambrose. Some, however, were almost silent from surprise at the feeling, which he seemed quite unconsciously to have betrayed. Mrs. Sinclair held out her hand to him, when no one was looking, and said quietly, 'Thank you so much, I can't tell you how I like your song.'

'Well,' said Laurence, as the party moved indoors into the lighted drawing-room, 'we have been all of us very sentimental to-night, and if we can't get better now, I hope we shall sleep it off, and wake up well and sane to-morrow morning.'

This being Saturday night, there sprang up some vague mention of church. The nearest church however was some miles distant, and a rumour arose amongst the guests that Dr. Jenkinson would perform the service and preach a sermon in the private chapel.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

N the following morning Lady Ambrose awoke somewhat out of spirits. Last night, whilst her maid was brushing her hair, she had pondered deeply over much that she had heard during the evening; and her thoughts having been once started in such a direction, the conviction quickly dawned upon her that the world was indeed becoming very bad, and that society was on the point of dissolution. This was quite a new view of things to her, and it had all the charm of novelty. Still, however, she would probably have found by the morning that she had successfully slept it off, if the post had not failed to bring her an invitation to the Duchess of ——'s garden-party at —— House, which she was expecting with some anxiety. As it was, therefore, her spirits failed to recover themselves, and whilst she was being dressed her thoughts wandered wistfully away to the promised

morning service in the chapel. At breakfast, however, another blow awaited her. How a private chapel had come to be mentioned last evening was not clear. Certainly there was no such appendage to Laurence's villa, and the susceptibilities of Lady Ambrose received a severe shock, as she learnt that the ministrations of Dr. Jenkinson, the comfort of which she was looking forward to, were to take place in the theatre which adjoined the house. She bore up, however, like a brave woman, and resolving that nothing, on her part at least, should be wanting, she appeared shortly before eleven o'clock, in full Sunday costume, with her bonnet, and her books of devotion.

Mrs. Sinclair looked at her in dismay. 'I had thought,' she said plaintively to Laurence, 'that, as this was only a morning performance, I need not make a toilette. And as for a prayer-book, why, dear Mr. Laurence, I have not had one since I was confirmed.'

'Not when you were married?' said Leslie.

'Perhaps,' said Mrs. Sinclair pensively, 'but I have forgotten all about that——now.'

At this moment the gong sounded, and the whole party, Lady Ambrose and her

bonnet amongst them, adjourned to the place of worship, which was connected with the house by a long corridor.

When the party entered they found themselves in a complete miniature theatre, with the gas, as there were no windows, fully burning. It had been arranged beforehand that the guests should occupy the boxes, the gallery being appropriated to the servants, whilst the stalls were to remain completely empty. The congregation entered with great decorum and gradually settled themselves in their places with a subdued whispering. Lady Ambrose buried her face in her hands for a few moments, and several of the younger ladies followed her example. Everyone then looked about them silently, in suspense and expectation. The scene that met their eyes was certainly not devotional. The whole little semicircle glittered with heavy gilding and with hangings of crimson satin, and against these the stucco limbs of a number of gods and goddesses gleamed pale and prominent. The gallery rested on the heads of nine scantily-draped Muses, who, had they been two less in number, might have passed for the seven deadly sins; round the frieze in high relief reeled a long procession of Fauns and Bacchanals; and half the harem

of Olympus sprawled and floated on the azure ceiling. Nor was this all. The curtain was down, and, brilliantly illuminated as it was, displayed before the eyes of the congregation Faust on the Brocken, with a long plume, dancing with the young witch, who could boast of no costume at all. The scene was so strange that everyone forgot to whisper or even to smile. There was a complete silence, and the eyes of all were soon fixed upon the curtain in wonder and expectation.

Presently a sound was heard. A door opened, and Dr. Jenkinson, in his ordinary dress, entered the stalls. He looked deliberately round him for a moment, as though he were taking stock of those present; then, selecting the central stall as a kind of *prie-dieu*, he knelt down facing his congregation, and after a moment's pause began to read the service in a simple, earnest voice. Lady Ambrose, however, though she knew her prayer-book as well as most women, could not for the life of her find the place. The reason was not far to seek. The Doctor was opening the proceedings with the following passage from the Koran, which he had once designed to use in Westminster Abbey as the text of a missionary sermon.

‘Be constant in prayer,’ he began, in a

voice tremulous with emotion, 'and give alms : and what good ye have sent before for your souls, ye shall find it with God. Surely God seeth that which ye do. They say, Verily none shall see Paradise except they be Jews or Christians. This is their wish. Say ye, Produce your proof of this if ye speak truth. Nay, but he who resigneth himself to God, and doeth that which is right, he shall have his reward with his Lord ; there shall come no fear on them, neither shall they be grieved.'¹

Dr. Jenkinson then went on to the Confession, the Absolution, and a number of other selections from the English morning service, omitting, however, the creed, and concluded the whole with a short prayer of St. Francis Xavier's.

But it was discovered that his voice, unless he made an effort, was unhappily only partly audible from the position which he occupied ; and Laurence, as soon as the Liturgy was over, went softly up to him to apprise him of the fact. Dr. Jenkinson was very grateful for being thus told in time. It was fortunate, he said, that the prayers only had been missed ; the question was, where should he go for the sermon. Laurence in a diffi-

¹ Koran, chap. ii. Sale's Translation.

dent manner proposed the stage; but the Doctor accepted the proposal with great alacrity, and Laurence went immediately out with him to conduct him to his new pulpit. In a few moments the curtain was observed to twitch and tremble; two or three abortive pulls were evidently being made; and at last Faust and the young witch rapidly rolled up, and discovered first the feet and legs, and then the entire person of Doctor Jenkinson, standing in the middle of a gorge in the Indian Caucasus—the remains of a presentation of Prometheus Bound which had taken place last February.

The Doctor was not a man to be abashed by incongruities. He looked about him for a moment: he slightly raised his eyebrows, and then, without the least discomposure, and in a clear incisive voice, began:—

‘In the tenth verse of the hundred and eleventh Psalm, it is said, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” ‘The fear of the Lord,’ he again repeated, more slowly, and with more emphasis, surveying the theatre as he spoke, ‘is the beginning of wisdom.’

He then made a long pause, looking down at his feet, as if, although he held his sermon-book in his hand, he were considering how to

begin. As he stood there silent, the footlights shining brightly on his silver hair, Lady Ambrose had full time to verify the text in her prayer-book. At last the Doctor suddenly raised his head, and with a gentle smile of benignity playing on his lips, shook open his manuscript, and thus proceeded :—

‘ The main difficulty that occupied the early Greek Philosophers, as soon as philosophy in its proper sense can be said to have begun, was the great dualism that seemed to run through all things. Matter and mind, the presence of imperfection, and the idea of perfection, or the unity and plurality of being, were amongst the various forms in which the two contradictory elements of things were presented to them, as demanding reconciliation or explanation. This manner of viewing things comes to a head, so to speak, amongst the ancients, in the system of Plato. With him the sensible and the intelligible worlds stand separated by a great gulf, the one containing all good, the other of itself only evil, until we recognise its relation to the good, and see that it is only a shadow and a type of it. The world of real existence is something outside, and virtually unconnected with, this world of mere phenomena ; and the Platonic prayer is that we should be taken out of the world, rather than,

as Christ says, with a fuller wisdom, that we should be delivered from the evil.

‘Plato had, however, by thus dwelling on this antagonism in things, paved the way for a reconciliation—some say he even himself began it. At any rate, it was through him that it was nearly, if not quite, accomplished by his disciple Aristotle. Aristotle first systematised the great principle of evolution, and transformed what had appeared to former thinkers as the dualism of mind and matter into a single scale of ascending existences. Thus what Plato had conceived of as two worlds, were now presented as opposite poles of the same. The πρώτη ὕλη, the world “without form and void,” receiving form, at length culminated in the soul of man; and in the soul of man sensation at length culminated in pure thought.’ A slight cough here escaped from Mrs. Sinclair. ‘You will perhaps think,’ the Doctor went on, ‘that a sermon is not the place in which to discuss such differences of secular opinion; or you will perhaps think that such differences are of no very great moment. But if you look under the surface, and at the inner meaning of them, you will find that they bear upon questions which are, or ought to be, of the very highest moment to each of us—questions indeed,’ the Doctor added, suddenly lowering his

manuscript for a moment, and looking sharply found at his audience, '*which we all of us here have very lately—very lately indeed—either discussed ourselves, or heard discussed by others.*' This produced an immediate sensation, especially amongst the feminine part of the listeners, to whom the discourse thus far had seemed strange, rather than significant. '*The question,*' the Doctor continued, '*is one of the relations of the spiritual to the natural; and the opposition between the views of these two ancient philosophers is by no means obsolete in our own century. There is even now far too prevalent a tendency to look upon the spiritual as something transcending and completely separate from the natural; and there is in the minds of many well-meaning and earnest persons a sort of alarm felt at any attempt to bring the two into connection. This feeling is experienced not by Christians only, but by a large number of their opponents. There is, for instance, no doctrine more often selected for attack by those who oppose Christianity upon moral grounds, than that of which my text is an expression, I mean the doctrine of a morality enforced by rewards and punishments. Such morality, we hear it continually urged by men who set themselves up as advanced thinkers, is no morality at all. No action can be good,*

they tell us, that does not spring from the love of good. Virtue is no longer virtue if it springs from fear. The very essence of it is to spring from freedom. Now, these arguments, though specious at the first blush of the thing, are really, if we look them honestly in the face, to the utmost shallow and unphilosophical. They are really but so many denials of the great doctrine of evolution—so many attempts to set up again that absolute antagonism between good and evil which it has been the aim of all the higher thinkers, and of Christ himself, to do away with. If, then, these modern critics of Christianity come to us with such objections, let us not try to disguise the truth that the morality of our religion is based on fear. Let us rather boldly avow this, and try to point out to them that it is they, and not the Psalmist, that are out of harmony with modern thought. For what is it that the sacred Scripture says? “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” The beginning, you will please to observe—the beginning only. It is not perfect wisdom, it is not perfect virtue; but it is the beginning of both of these. It is, if I may be allowed the expression, the moral protoplasm—it is that out of which they are both evolved. It is, as Aristotle would call it, their potentiality. The actuality is different

from the potentiality ; for " perfect love," as St. John says, " casteth out fear." Putting together, then, the ideas of these two good men, St. John and Aristotle, we may say that the love of God—that is, true wisdom—is the actuality of the fear of Him.

' This account of the origin of the true wisdom may not, indeed, be applicable to each individual case. Some persons'—the Doctor's voice here grew very soft, and seemed as though it would almost break with feeling—' some persons may have been so fortunate as to have received the truest wisdom into their hearts by education, almost with their mother's milk. But there are those not so fortunate, who may have needed the discipline of a godly fear to lead them upwards from a " wallowing in the sensual sty" towards the higher life. And just as this is true of many of us individually, so it is still more deeply true of the human race as a whole. All study of history, and of social science, and of philosophy, is teaching this to us every day with increasing clearness. The human race, as soon as it became human, feared God before it loved Him. Its fear, as the Scripture puts it, was the beginning of its wisdom ; or as modern thought has put it, in slightly different words, the love of justice sprang out of the fear of suffering in-

justice. Thus the end is different from the beginning, and yet springs out of it. Ethics, as it has been well said, are the finest fruits of humanity, but they are not its roots. Our reverence for truth, all our sacred family ties, and the purest and most exalted forms of matrimonial attachment, have each their respective origins in self-interest, self-preservation, and animal appetite.

' There is, I admit, in this truth something that may at first sight repel us, and perhaps even prompt some of us to deny indignantly that it is a truth at all. But this is really a cowardly and unworthy feeling, fatal to any true comprehension of God's dealings with man, and arising from a quite mistaken conception of our own dignity, and our own connection with God. It is some such mistaken conception as this that sets so many of us against the discoveries of modern science as to the origin of our own species, and, what is far worse, prompts us to oppose such discoveries with dishonest objections. How is it possible, some of us ask, that man with his sublime conceptions of duty and of God, and his fine apparatus of reason, and so forth, should be produced by any process of evolution from a beastly and irrational ape? But to ask such questions as these is really to call in question the power

of God, and so to do Him dishonour. It is true that we cannot trace out, as yet, all the steps of this wonderful evolution; but let us not be found, like doubting Thomas, resolved not to believe until we have actually seen. And yet, if our faith does indeed require strengthening, we have only to look a little more attentively at the commonest facts before us. For is it not, let me ask you—to take, for instance, a man's sublime faculty of reasoning and logical comprehension—far more wonderful that a reasoning man should have the same parents as a woman, than that they both should have the same parents as a monkey? Science and religion both alike teach us that with God all things are possible.

‘I just touch in passing upon this doctrine that we popularly call Darwinism, because it is the most familiar example to us of the doctrine of evolution. But the point which I am wishing to emphasize is not the outward evolution of man, but the inward, of which, however, the former is an image and a likeness. This theory of moral evolution, I wish to point out to you, is alike the Christian and the scientific theory; and I thus wish you to see that the very points in which science seems most opposed to Christianity are really those in which it most fundamentally agrees with it. I will

therefore just ask you to notice how foolish and short-sighted those persons are who think that a great result is lessened if it can be proved to have had small beginnings. Is a state less truly a state because we know that it has sprung out of the germ of the family? Surely not. Neither is man less truly man if he have sprung from an ape; nor is love less truly love if it has sprung from fear.

And so now, since we have seen how science and Christianity are at one as to the rise of the moral sentiments, I will pass on to a wider point, the character and the history of Christianity itself, both of which have been misunderstood and misinterpreted for at least eighteen hundred years; and when I have pointed out how this great subject is being now explained by the methods of modern science, I will pass on to an issue that is wider yet.

'The world has hitherto failed to understand Christianity, because it studied it upon a false method—a method based upon that old dualistic theory of things of which I have already spoken. Just as Plato looked upon mind as entirely distinct from matter, so used Christians to look upon things sacred as entirely distinct from things secular. But now this middle wall of partition is being broken down by science, and by scientific criticism, and

by a wider view of things in general. The primary way in which all this has affected Christianity, is by the new spirit in which it has led us to study the Bible. We used to look upon the Bible as a book standing apart by itself, and to be interpreted by a peculiar canon of criticism. But we have now learnt that it is to be studied just like all other books; and we are now for the first time coming to understand what, in its true grandeur, a real revelation is. We are learning, in fact, that just as no single scripture "is of any private interpretation;" still less is the entire body of the Scriptures. They, too, must be interpreted by their context. We must inquire into their origin; we must ask diligently under what circumstances they were written and edited, and for what ends. Nor must we ever again fall into such quaint and simple mistakes as did commentators like Origen, or Augustine, or Tertullian, or even Paul himself, whose discoveries of Messianic prophecies in writings like the Psalms for instance, are really much the same as would be a discovery on our part in Mr. Tennyson's line on the death of the Duke of Wellington, "The last great Englishman is low," a prophecy of the late Chancellor of the Exchequer. But to understand the meaning of any text, we must try to see what, from

his position and education, the writer could have meant by it; not what this or that Father, living long afterwards, fancied that he meant. Our motto in religion, as in science, should be, "*Vere scire est per causas scire.*"

'If we study Christianity reverently and carefully upon these principles, we shall see that it was not a thing that sprang up, as we used to fancy, without any human antecedents, but that its roots reach back with many ramifications into the western and oriental thought of preceding centuries. We shall see how it absorbed into itself all that was highest in Hebraistic Theism and in Hellenic thought—something too, let us admit, of the failings of both. I cannot here enter into any of the details of this, what may be truly termed pre-Christian Christianity. I can only briefly point out its existence, and its double origin, commenting on these by the following few lines from a great German writer. "The yearning after a higher revelation," he tells us, "was the universal characteristic of the last centuries of the ancient world. This was in the first place but a consciousness of the decline of the classical nations and their culture, and the presentiment of the approach of a new era; and it called into life not only Christianity, but also, and before it, Pagan and Jewish

Alexandrianism, and other related developments."

'This, then, is the great point to be borne in mind—viz. that God had been preparing the way for the coming of Christ long before he sent "Elias, which was for to be." Neither John Baptist, no, nor One greater than John, was left by God (as the children of Israel were left by Pharaoh) to gather straw himself to make bricks. The materials were all prepared ready to their hands by their Heavenly Father. And so, let us be especially and prayerfully on our guard against considering Christianity as having come into the world at once, ready-made, so to speak, by our Saviour, as a body of theological doctrines. Any honest study of history will show us that the Apostles received no such system; that our Lord Himself never made any claim to the various characters with which subsequent thought invested Him; and that to attribute such claims to Him would be an anachronism, of which He would Himself have scarcely understood the meaning. If we only clear our eyes of any false theological glamour, a very slight study of the inspired writers will at once show us this. We shall see how uncertain and shifting at first everything was. We shall see what a variety of conflicting opinions the early Church entertained even

upon the most fundamental subjects—such, for instance, as the identity of the God of the Old Testament with the God of the New, which was denied by a large number of the early Christians: we shall see how widely divergent were the systems of Jewish and Pauline Christianity, and how discrepant and tentative are the accounts given by St. Paul and by the author of the Fourth Gospel of the mystical nature of Christ, whom they tried to identify with different mysterious potencies supposed by the Jewish-Alexandrian philosophers to be coexistent with God. And if we pursue the history of the Church a little farther, we shall find many more things to startle us. We shall find, for instance, the most renowned apologist of early Catholic times, a materialist, holding the materiality not of the soul of man only, but of God also. “*Nihil enim*”—these are this father’s words—“*si non corpus. Omne quod est, corpus est.*” Thus we see,’ said the Doctor cheerfully, looking round him with a smile of benignant triumph, and blinking with his eyes, ‘that difference of opinion about the dogmas of religion is nothing new. It existed in the Jewish Church; the phenomenon was only prolonged by Christianity. Later Judaism and primitive Christianity were both made up of a variety of systems, all honestly

and boldly thought out, differing widely from each other, and called by the honourable appellation of heresies : and of these, let me remind you, it is the glory of the Church of England to be composed likewise.

‘*Nor is this all,*’ he went on in a softer and more appealing tone ; ‘*not only are all these things so confused and doubtful ; but we now see that, in the face of recent criticism, we cannot even be quite sure about any of the details of the divine life of our Lord. But in all this*’—the Doctor’s voice here became still more ærial, and he fixed his eyes upon the painted ceiling of the theatre, as though he were gazing on some glorious vision—‘*in all this there is nothing to discompose us. We can be quite sure that He lived, and that He went about doing good, and that in him we have, in the highest sense, everlasting life.*

‘*Let us then no longer fight against the conclusions of science and of criticism, but rather see in them the hand of God driving us, even against our will, away from beliefs and teachings that are not really those of His son. If we do not do this—if we persist in identifying the false Christianity with the true—the false, when it is at last plucked rudely away from us, as it must be, will carry away a part of the true with it. And as long as we are in*

this state of mind, we are never for a moment safe. We can never open a philological review, or hear of a scientific experiment, without trembling. Witness the discussions now engaging so much public attention on the subject of animal automatism, and the marvellous results which experiments on living subjects have of late days revealed to us; a frog with half a brain having destroyed more theology than all the doctors of the Church with their whole brains can ever build up again. Thus does God choose the "weak things of this world to confound the wise." Seeing, then, that this is the state of the case, we should surely learn henceforth not to identify Christianity with anything that science can assail, or even question. Let us say rather that nothing is or can be essential to the religion of Christ which, when once stated, can be denied without absurdity. If we can only attain to this conception, we shall see truly that this our faith is indeed one "that no man taketh away from us."

'If we be thus once "stablished in the faith," all human history, and the history of Christianity especially, will assume for us a new sacredness and a new significance. We shall recognise gladly its long struggles of growth, and its struggles for existence, and see how in all these were at work the great prin-

principles of evolution. We shall see how Christian perfection emerged gradually out of imperfection—nay, that it was only through imperfection that this perfection was possible. For although, as we now know, all the various theological systems that have sprung up about Christianity, and have been so long current, are not Christianity, are most of them, indeed, not even sense—yet it was through these that true Christianity made its way, and extended itself in a corrupt and ignorant world. For the world has been given from age to age just so much of the truth as it has been able to bear, and it is only, let us remember, from receiving it tempered in this wise proportion, that it has been able to receive it at all. But these times of the world's probation are now passing away. It is now at length ceasing to be under "tutors and governors;" it is learning to "put away childish things." It is coming to a sense that it is now fitted to receive Christ's truth pure, and without any admixture or wrappage of falsehood. And so, as it looks back over all the various opinions once so fiercely agitated about religion, it recognises in all of them a common element of good, and it sees that all theologians and all sects have really agreed with one another, and been meaning the same thing, even when they least suspected or wished it.

Nor is it, as modern study is showing us, varieties of Christianity only that this deeper unity underlies, but all other religions also. It has been well observed by a great Roman Catholic writer now living, that whenever any great saintliness of life is to be observed amongst infidels and heretics, it is always found to be due to the presence of certain beliefs and rules which belong to the Catholics. And in like manner, we may say too, that whenever any great saintliness of life is to be observed amongst Catholics, it is due to the presence of certain beliefs and rules that belong to the infidels and the heretics—and indeed to all good men, no matter what their religion is.

‘Such are the views that all the most enlightened men of our own day are coming to. But the process is gradual; and meanwhile let us not rebuke our weaker brethren, if for the present “they follow not after us;” let us rather bear with them, and make all allowance for them; for we must remember, as I have said before, that those evils to which they still cling, but from which we, under God’s mercy, are trying to free ourselves, have done good service in their time; and that even such doctrines as those of eternal punishment, or of sacerdotal absolution, or the subtleties of sacramental systems, or the mystical paradoxes of

the Athanasian Creed, have assisted in the evolution of the good—have been, in some sense, “schoolmasters to bring men to God.” And even if we do occasionally come across some incident in the history of our religion—some doctrine or body of doctrines, which seems, humanly speaking, to subserve no good end at all—such as our own Thirty-nine Articles—let us not suffer such to try our faith, but let us trust in God, believing that in His secret councils He has found some fitting use even for these; because we know how many things there are, in every branch of inquiry, that we cannot explain, and yet we know that nothing happens but by those immutable and eternal laws which our Heavenly Father has Himself ordained, and of which He is Himself the highest synthesis.

‘*And now,*’ said the Doctor, with a fresh briskness in his voice, ‘*I shall pass on to that wider point to which I have already alluded, which is indeed that which I wish chiefly to impress upon you, and to which all that I have hitherto said has been preparatory. We have come to see how genuine Christianity has been enabled to grow and extend itself only through an admixture of what we now recognise as evil. And seeing this, we shall be led on to a conclusion that is much wider. It has been said*

that it is the part of the devil to see in good the germs of evil. Is it not also the part of the devil not to recognise in evil the germs of good? May we not indeed say with St. Augustine, that absolute evil is impossible, because, if we look at it rightly, it is always rising up into good? And so, may we not recognise in all things the presence and the providence of God?

‘Perhaps this view may at first sight seem difficult. Some of us may find that we have a certain amount of pride to swallow before we can cheerfully acquiesce in it. It is not an uncommon thing to find persons who secretly flatter their vanity by cherishing a gloomy view of the world and of mankind. But if we can only get free from these littlenesses, and attain to that view which I have indicated, it will enlarge and ameliorate our own philosophy of things, and bring life and trust to us, in the place of doubt and despondency. Evil will then appear to us simply as undeveloped good—as something which we may acquiesce in without complaining—as something that has assisted in the development of whatever is good in the present, and which will itself one day become good in the future. Indeed it is not too much to say that all things, in a certain sense, existed first in the form of evil. It was

not till after the Spirit of God had worked on the primeval matter that God pronounced the world to be "very good."

' And so, if we consider the subject thus, we shall learn to put a stop to all those fretful wailings over the badness of our own times of which we hear so much—wailings over the unbelief of our neighbours, the corruption of society, the misery of the poor, the luxury of the rich, or the decline of commercial morality. The present is an age of change, and is therefore at every turn presenting to us some new feature. But if these come to us in the apparent guise of evils, let us not uselessly bemoan them; but let us believe that they are, even if we cannot see that it is so, but the beginnings, the embryos of new good. Indeed, by the eye of faith, even in the present day, may be discerned the beautiful spectacle of good actually shining through evil. May we not, for instance, discern the well-being of the rich through the misery of the poor? and again, the honest industry of the poor through the idleness of the rich?'

' If, then, these things be so, surely we may look on unmoved at the great changes and commotions that are going on around us, and the new forms that society, and thought, and politics are assuming, even although for the

moment they may appear threatening. And if in this great storm our Master have fallen asleep, and no longer speak audibly to us, let us not be of little faith and fearful, and try to awaken Him with our foolish clamours; but let us trust all to Him, and follow His example. For really, if we do but trust in God, there is no ground for fear, but "all things work together for good to him that believeth." And, however the matter may strike us at first sight, the times we live in are really the times that are best fitted for us; and we shall see, if we will but think soberly, that we could not, as a whole, alter anything in them for the better. I do not mean that we have not each of us his own work marked out for him to do; but all this work is strictly in relation to things as they are. God has given to us the general conditions under which we are to serve Him, and these are the best and indeed the only conditions for us. Doubtless, if we each do the duty that lies before us, these conditions will be slowly and insensibly changed by us; but we shall ourselves change also, as well as the conditions; what I mean is, that supposing by a sudden act of will we could do what we pleased with the conditions of the age, we, being as we are, should not be really able to make the age better. We should not be really able to make

it different. Any Utopia we might imagine would, if it were a thinkable one, be only our own age in a masquerading dress. For we cannot escape from our age, or add, except in a very small degree, anything that is really new to it. Nor need we wish to do so. Our age is for us the best age possible. We are its children, and it is our only true parent. But though we cannot alter our time at a stroke, so to speak, no, not even in imagination, we can all of us help to do so little by little, if we do cheerfully the duties that are set before us. And if we do this, which is what Christ bids us to do, then is Christ made manifest in us, and lives in the hearts of every one of us; and in a far higher sense than any mere physical one, He is risen from the dead. And if He be not so risen in and for us, then are we indeed, as the Apostle says, "of all men most miserable."

'Let us therefore, with a large hope for the future, and a cheerful contentment with the present, be willing to leave the world in the hands of God, knowing that He has given us what conditions and what circumstances are best for us. Let us see all things in God, and let us become in Him, as Plato says, "spectators of all time, and of all existence." And thus, in spite of the difficulties presented to us by

“all the evil that is done under the sun,” we shall perceive that all things will, nay must, come right in God’s own time; and the apparent dualism of good and evil at last become a glorious unity of good. But let us remember also that “the Kingdom of God cometh not with observation;” and I would conclude my sermon with certain memorable words spoken by Christ Himself, though unfortunately not to be found in the Gospels, but preserved to us by Clement of Alexandria. “The Lord,” Clement tells us, “being asked when His kingdom should come, said, When two shall be one, and that which is without as that which is within, and the male with the female—neither male nor female.”

‘——And now——’ (at the sound of this word the whole congregation rose automatically to their feet), ‘I will ask you,’ the Doctor went on after a pause, ‘to conclude this morning’s service by doing what I trust I have shown that all here may sincerely and honestly do. I mean, I will ask you to recite after me the Apostles’ Creed.’

This appeal took the whole congregation quite aback. But there was no time for wonder. Dr. Jenkinson at once began; nor was his voice the only sound in the theatre. Lady Ambrose, pleased, after all that she had heard

the night previous, to make public profession of her faith, especially in a place where it could not be called in question, followed the Doctor audibly and promptly ; Miss Prattle followed Lady Ambrose ; Lady Violet Gresham, who was busy with one of her sleeve-links, followed Miss Prattle ; Lady Grace, from quite another part of the house, followed Dr. Jenkinson on her own account ; Mr. Stockton repeated the first clause in a loud voice, and then relapsed into marked silence ; Mr. Luke only opened his lips to sigh out audibly in the middle a disconsolate ‘ Heigh ho ! ’ Mr. Storks blew his nose with singular vigour through the whole proceeding ; Mrs. Sinclair, just towards the end, tapped Leslie’s arm gently with her fan, and said to him in a whisper, ‘ Do you really believe all this ? ’

When all was over, when the Doctor had solemnly pronounced the last ‘ Amen,’ he looked about him nervously for a moment, as if the question of how to retire becomingly suddenly dawned upon him. Luckily he perceived almost directly a servant standing in readiness by the curtain. The Doctor frowned slightly at the man ; made a slightly impatient gesture at him ; and Faust and the young witch again covered the preacher from the eyes of his congregation.

CHAPTER II.

THE blinds were half-down at luncheon in the dining-room, to keep out the brilliant summer sun.

The guests dropped in by ones and twos, somewhat tired and exhausted by the divine service of the morning ; and the sight of the table was not a little refreshing to them, as it shone whitely in the soft gloom, with its flowers and ferns, and its day-lit glimmer of glass and silver. Soon, however, a piece of news was circulated that was even more refreshing than the luncheon. Dr. Jenkinson, owing to his late exertions, and the gas-light, and the draughts upon the stage, was suffering from a headache, which inclined him to keep his room ; and accordingly an un hoped-for prospect of freely discussing the sermon dawned brightly upon the whole party.

Mr. Stockton, who had been much struck with the strictly prosaic style of Dr. Jenkinson's discourse, and who had been secretly contrasting this with the more impassioned

character of his own mind, was the first to begin.

‘The sermon was perhaps ingenious,’ he said, turning to Lady Ambrose, ‘but I’m afraid our friend’s forte is certainly not poetry.’

‘Surely,’ said Donald Gordon with extreme solemnity of manner and only a slight twinkle in his eye, ‘his forte is something far better. Poetry can only make us happy for a little while. Such doctrines as we have heard this morning ought to make us happy always.’

As for Lady Ambrose, to whom both these remarks were addressed, she was in doubt what altogether to think of the matter. More than half her heart inclined her to look upon Dr. Jenkinson as a valuable ally; but there was yet, all the while, a fatal something that whispered to her a vague distrust of him. She was therefore waiting anxiously to hear what would be said by others, before taking any side herself; her mind all the while being busy with the profoundest questions. This suspense of judgment produced a certain gravity and depression in her, which was visible on her face, and which seemed to communicate itself to nearly everyone at her end of the table. For Lady Ambrose was a communicative woman. Her spirits, good or

bad, were generally caught by those near her. As for Mr. Herbert, however, no one else seemed needed to depress *him*. Low, slow, and melancholy, his accents at once caught the ear of Lady Ambrose.

‘I have heard to-day,’ he said to Mrs. Sinclair, who was sitting next him, ‘an entirely new and in every way memorable doctrine, which I never heard before from the mouth of man, woman, or child; nor can I tell by what steps any human being could have arrived at it. I have heard that the world—the world as it is—could not be better than it is; that there is no real sorrow in it—no real evil—no real sin.’

‘Poor Dr. Jenkinson!’ said Mrs. Sinclair, also in a melancholy voice; ‘I suppose he has never loved.’

‘Ah,’ exclaimed Mr. Stockton,—his voice was melancholy as well—‘the whole teachings of that school have always seemed to me nothing more than a few fragments of science imperfectly understood, obscured by a few fragments of Christianity imperfectly remembered.’

‘You forget,’ said Leslie, ‘that Dr. Jenkinson’s Christianity is really a new firm trading under an old name, and trying to purchase the goodwill of the former establishment.’

Lady Ambrose, who had not liked Leslie so much on further acquaintance as she had at first expected she should, was very indignant at him for so flippant a speech as this—she felt sure it was flippant, though she did not quite understand its meaning—but once again Mr. Herbert's grave accents arrested her.

'It is simply,' he was saying to Mrs. Sinclair, evidently alluding to the same subject—'it is simply our modern atheism trying to hide its own nakedness, for the benefit of the more prudish part of the public, in the cast grave-clothes of a Christ who, whether he be risen or no, is very certainly, as the angel said, not here.'

'All discussion of such matters seems to me but a diseased activity,' said Mr. Rose, raising languidly a white deprecating hand.

Mr. Storcks too, though for different reasons, was apparently of the same opinion.

'In his main points,' he said with a severe dogmatism that seemed designed to end all further controversy, 'and putting aside his quasi-religious manner of expressing it—which considering his position may be pardoned—I conceive Dr. Jenkinson to have been entirely right.'

Hitherto Lady Ambrose's views had been

wavering to and fro, in a sad uncertainty. But now her mind at once cleared. Her worst suspicions of the Doctor were confirmed by this fatal commendation. The gloom on her face deepened, and she had a look almost of distress about her as she turned to Laurence.

‘You look tired,’ he said to her.

‘No,’ said Lady Ambrose wearily: ‘at least, perhaps I am a little. Do you know, I always think one feels rather dull if one doesn’t get the letters one expects.’

‘Perhaps you don’t know,’ said Laurence, ‘that the letters you got this morning were only those of last night’s post. Our Sunday letters we are obliged to send for, and they don’t generally come till later on in the day.’

‘Really!’ exclaimed Lady Ambrose, with surprise, as a smile slowly spread over her face, and her frank eyes lit up again. ‘The Duchess couldn’t have forgotten it,’ she said to herself half-consciously. Strangely enough, a new warmth, it seemed, had dawned upon her, and her ice-bound gloom began to thaw—to thaw only, however, not to evaporate. It did not go; it only became voluble.

‘Do you know, Mr. Laurence,’ she began, ‘I have been thinking over and over again

about many of the things that were said last night; and I really am afraid that the world is getting very bad. It is very sad to think so; but, with all this infidelity and wickedness of which we hear so much, I'm afraid it is true. For my own part, you know, there is nothing I dislike so much as to hear the Bible profanely spoken about; though, of course, I know one is tempted sometimes to make jokes out of it oneself. And then,' Lady Ambrose added—her ideas did not always follow one another in the strictest order—'hardly a week passes without some new scandal. I had a letter only this morning, telling me all the particulars about Colonel Eardly and poor Lady Arthur. And that man, you know—just fancy it!—it will not be very long before we shall be obliged to receive him again. However,' said Lady Ambrose, with a slightly more cheerful accent, 'that sort of thing, I believe, is confined to us. The middle classes are all right—at least, one always hears so.'

At this moment Lord Allen's voice was heard.

'But now,' Lady Ambrose went on to Laurence, very slightly moving her head in the direction of Lord Allen, and speaking in a low tone, 'how different *he* is!'

Lady Ambrose had the greatest admiration for Lord Allen, though her acquaintance with him had hitherto been of the slightest; and Laurence, not knowing how to respond to all her late remarks, was glad that her attention was thus called elsewhere.

‘Don’t you think,’ Allen was saying, half addressing himself to Mr. Herbert, half to Mr. Luke, ‘that though at the present moment things as they are may be worse than they have ever been before, there are yet ideas amongst us of things as they might be, that are in advance of what has ever been before? I know quite well how society is falling to pieces, and how all our notions of duty are becoming confused or lost. I know too how utterly without any religion we are’—(Lady Ambrose started)—‘at least, any religion that one man can express to another, and that can enable men to act in concert. But still, I can’t help feeling that, in spite of all this, a higher class of conceptions both of religion and morality, and social relations also, is forming itself in the minds of thinking men.’

‘Perfectly true, Lord Allen,’ said Mr. Luke, ‘perfectly true! It is indeed the very essence of the cultured classes to be beyond their time—to have, indeed, every requisite

for making everything better, except the practical power. As you say, what man's life ought to be—what true morality is—what is true sense, and what is true nonsense—these are matters never at any time distinguished so truly as by some of us in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Only, unfortunately,' said Mr. Luke, sighing slowly, and looking round the table, 'the dense ignorance of the world at large hampers and hinders such men as these, so that all that their teaching and their insight can do, is only to suggest a Utopia in the future, instead of leading to any reality in the present.'

'All *my* happiness is in a kind of Utopia,' sighed Mrs. Sinclair.

'Yes—yes,' said Mr. Luke wearily; 'so in these days must be the happiness of all of us—except that of the world at large.'

Mr. Storcks was here heard clearing his throat. With an ominous pugilistic smile he turned towards Mr. Luke.

'Are you quite sure,' he said, 'that the reason why your friends do nothing practical is not because they will build Utopias? I, as I have already said, entirely hold with Dr. Jenkinson that the world is as good as it can be—has, indeed, been always as good as it could have been—has, that is, been always

persistently progressing by one constant course of evolution. I don't myself profess to be a student of history ; but, as far as I at all understand its teachings, the one thing it most clearly shows to us is, that what strikes a superficial observer as simply the decadence of old orders of things, is really, under the surface, the birth of the new. Indeed,' said Mr. Storke, shrugging his shoulders, 'of course it must be so. We are all part of Nature ; and, little as we think it, we are all working together by invincible and inviolable laws. Nature will have her own way ; and those who have studied her carefully know that her way is always the best. Even supposing we could transplant ourselves into some different, some more advanced state of society, my dear sir, do you think we should be any happier there ? As much happier, I suppose, as you or I should be if we were translated into the heaven our nurses used to tell us of, where nothing was done but to sing Tate and Brady's psalms with the angels to all eternity. The air of our own age is the only air fit for us. In any other we should languish.'

'I languish in this,' said Mr. Luke, looking up to the ceiling.

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth than Mr. Saunders exclaimed, in his most ex-

cited and shrillest voice, 'I deny it—I entirely deny it!'

Mr. Luke was thunderstruck. Even Mr. Storke was taken aback by the audacity of the contradiction; and as for the rest of the company, they could not conceive where on earth Mr. Saunders had left his manners. Mr. Storke, however, was still more astonished, and still less pleased, when he discovered, as Mr. Saunders proceeded, what was the real meaning of his speech.

'I entirely deny,' Mr. Saunders went on, 'that the ways of Nature are the best ways. The belief that they are so is of all faiths the one that most obviously contradicts experience. Did I accept this, I could accept anything—Transubstantiation even. I should literally feel that I had no right to condemn any doctrine because it was groundless, gratuitous, and absurd. This faith in the goodness of Nature—why, that it *is* a faith, is not that enough to condemn it? What but faith, let me ask, has enslaved and stunted the world hitherto? And this particular faith, I would remind you, which you flatter yourself will oppose religion, has been in most cases its child, and is always ready to be its parent. I on the contrary maintain that, far from being the best, Nature is the most odious of things

—that the whole universe is constructed on the most hateful principles ; in fact, that out of the primordial atoms only one thing has developed itself in which the good outweighs the evil ; and that is the one thing that is usually opposed to Nature—man, and the reason of man.’

Mr. Storks turned sharply round, and, with an awful look in his eyes of contemptuous indignation, stared Mr. Saunders into silence. He held him fixed in this way for a few moments, and then said to him in a voice of grim unconcern, ‘May I trouble you for the mustard.’ Then again turning to Mr. Luke, ‘You see,’ he proceeded, ‘what I take to be civilisation—indeed, the whole duty of man—is the gradual self-adaptation of the human organism to its environment—an adaptation which must take place, and any attempts to hinder which are simply neither more nor less than disease. Progress, which it is our highest life to further, is a thing that will continue despite the opposition of individuals. Its tendencies are beyond the control of individuals, and are to be sought in the spirit of the age at large,—not—if you will forgive me the word—in the crotchets of this or that thinker. And it seems to me to be the hopeful and distinguishing feature of the present day, that

men are learning generally to recognise this truth—that they are learning not to cry out against progress, but to investigate its grand and inevitable laws, and submit themselves willingly to them. And the tendency of our own day is, I am proud to say, a tendency towards firm, solid, verifiable knowledge, and, as a result of this, towards the acquisition of a firm and solid happiness also.’

‘To me,’ said Mr. Herbert, ‘it seems rather that the only hope for the present age lies in the possibility of some individual wiser than the rest getting the necessary power, and in the most arbitrary way possible putting a stop to this progress—utterly stamping out and obliterating every general tendency peculiar to our own time. Mr. Storks will perhaps think me very foolish. Perhaps I am. I freely own that I could more easily tell a good action, if I saw it, than a good piece of protoplasm, and that I think the understanding of a holy moral law, by which an individual may live, of infinitely more importance than the discovery of all the laws of progress in the world. But let Mr. Storks despise me, and not be angry with me——’

‘My dear sir,’ interposed Mr. Storks,

with a gruff courtesy, 'why should I do either the one or the other?'

'Because,' said Mr. Herbert, slightly waving his hand, and speaking with great emphasis, 'had I only the power, I would myself put a forcible stop to all this evolution. I would make a clean sweep of all the improvements that the present day so much vaunts. I would collect an army of strong, serviceable, honest workmen, and send them to blow up Manchester, and Birmingham, and Liverpool, and Leeds, and Wolverhampton——'

'And all the artisans in them?' asked Mr. Storks.

'Well,' said Mr. Herbert, smiling, 'I would, perhaps, give the artisans notice of this gunpowder plot of mine. And yet their existence has always presented a painful difficulty to me. For if there is no other life, I think they have a very bad time of it here; and if there is another life, I think that they will all certainly be damned. But it is not only Manchester and Birmingham that I would blow up. I would blow up also every anatomical museum in the land, save such as were absolutely necessary for the use of professional doctors, that the foul sights in them should not taint men's imaginations, and give

them an appetite for beastly knowledge. I would destroy every railway, and nearly every steam-engine; and I would do a number of other things of a like sort, by way of preparing the ground for a better state of society. Indeed, so far am I from believing that an entirely different and better state of society is unthinkable, that I believe it to be not impracticable; and I am at the present moment collecting money, from such as will here and there confide in me, for the purpose of purchasing land, and of founding a community upon what seem to me to be true and healthful principles—a Utopia, in fact—in which I trust may be once again realised upon earth those two things to which we are now such strangers—order and justice.’

‘I once began a book about justice,’ said Laurence, ‘on the model of Plato’s Republic.’

‘What is Plato’s Republic?’ said Lady Ambrose. ‘Tell me.’

‘It is a book,’ said Laurence, ‘which describes the meeting of a party of friends, who fell discussing high topics just as we are doing, and, amongst others, What is justice?’

‘What!’ exclaimed Lady Ambrose. ‘Did not they know that?’

‘You forget,’ said Laurence, ‘that this was very long ago.’

‘To be sure,’ said Lady Ambrose; ‘and they were of course all heathens. Well—and what conclusions did they come to as to the nature of justice?’

‘At first,’ said Laurence, ‘though Socrates himself was amongst them, they were all completely at a loss how to define it. But at last they hit upon the notion of constructing an ideal perfect state, in which of course justice would be lurking somewhere. Now there are in life, Plato says, four great virtues—wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice; and no sooner has the ideal state been constructed, than it appears that three of these virtues are specially illustrated and embodied, each in a particular class of citizens. Thus, wisdom is specially embodied in the theoretical politicians and religious speculators of the day; courage is embodied in the practical men who maintain and execute the regulations and orders of the philosophers; and temperance is embodied in the commercial and industrial classes, who loyally submit themselves to their betters, and refrain from meddling in matters that are too high for them. And now, where is justice? In what class is that embodied specially?’

‘In the judges and the magistrates and the policemen,’ said Lady Ambrose.

‘No,’ said Laurence ; ‘it is peculiar to no class. It resides in all. It is that virtue which enables the others to exist and to continue.’

‘But surely,’ said Lady Ambrose, ‘all that is not what we mean by justice now ?’

‘Certainly not,’ said Laurence ; ‘and my book was designed to investigate what justice is, as it exists now. I, like Plato, constructed a state, making it, however, a real rather than an ideal picture. But when I had done this, I could find no earnest thinking class to represent wisdom ; no class of practical politicians that would carry out even the little wisdom they knew, and so represent courage ; and certainly no commercial or industrial class that would refrain for a single day from meddling in matters that were too high for them, and so represent temperance. So I analysed life in a somewhat different way. I divided it into happiness, misery, and justice. I then at once discovered that the rich represented all the happiness of which we are now capable, and the poor all the misery ; and that justice was that which set this state of things going and enabled it to continue.’

‘Ah, Laurence,’ exclaimed Mr. Herbert,

clapping his hands gently in sad applause, 'I like that. I wish you had worked out this idea more fully.'

'Suppose,' exclaimed Leslie, 'that we try this afternoon to construct a Utopia ourselves. Let us embody our notions of life as it ought to be in a new Republic.'

'Well,' said Lady Ambrose, 'I am not a Conservative; I don't object. I'm sure at any rate that there is much we could all of us alter, if we only had our own way.'

'Much,' said Lady Grace, with severe briskness.

'Much,' said Miss Merton, with a soft, half-serious smile.

'Much,' said Lord Allen, catching eagerly at the idea.

'Well, then,' said Laurence, 'let us all do our best to give those airy somethings, our aspirations, a local habitation and a name.'

The majority of the company took very kindly to the proposal. Lady Grace was especially pleased, as it seemed to provide at once a whole afternoon's occupation for the party; and it was arranged accordingly that as soon as luncheon was over they should adjourn for castle-building to a shady spot in the garden.

CHAPTER III.

GUIDED by Lady Grace, the guests gradually converged after luncheon towards the appointed spot, straggling thither by various ways, and in desultory groups; passing down broad flights of steps flanked by gods and goddesses, and along straight terraces set with vases and Irish yews; while busts of orators, poets, and philosophers, with Latin inscriptions, glimmered to right and left of them in groves of laurels; and scaly Tritons, dappled with green lichens, spouted up water in the middle of gleaming basins. Everything was to-day looking at its loveliest. There was an unusual freshness in the warm summer air. Beyond the green shrubs the sea shone bright and blue; and through the shrubs the sea-breeze moved and whispered.

Laurence strolled slowly on behind with Miss Merton, choosing a path which none of the others had taken.

‘How delicious this is!’ said Miss Merton,

lifting her hat to enjoy the breeze upon her forehead. 'Nobody could be in bad spirits in a place like this. There is something so fresh and living everywhere, and even when we lose sight of the sea we still hear it.'

'Yes,' said Laurence. 'I believe these gardens are like Keats's island. There is no recess in them

Not haunted by the murmurous sound of waves.'

'And how perfectly everything is kept! What gardeners you must have!' said Miss Merton, as they turned up a narrow winding walk, thickly set on either side with carefully-trimmed laurels.

The whole place was, indeed, as Miss Merton said, kept perfectly. Not a weed was on the grey gravel; not a single twig called for pruning. Every vase they passed was full of the most delicious flowers. Overhead the branches of limes and of acacia-trees murmured gaily. Everything seemed to be free from care, and to be laughing, light of heart, in the bright weather.

'I am taking you this way,' said Laurence, 'because I want to show you what I think may perhaps interest you.'

As he spoke these words, a sudden bend in the walk brought them face to face with

something that gave Miss Merton a sudden sensation of surprise. It was a small classical portico built in a style of the most severe simplicity, through which by an iron gate one passed into an open space beyond. What surprised Miss Merton on seeing this was the singular sense of desolation and dreariness that seemed all at once to come over her. The iron gates before her were a mass of rust; the portico, which had once been white, was weather-stained into a dismal grey; the stone, too, it was built of was scaling off in almost every place, and the fragments lay unheeded as they had fallen upon the ground. Here, amongst everything that spoke of the utmost care, was one object that spoke of entire forgetfulness and neglect. They approached in silence, and Miss Merton looked in through the bars of the rusty gate. The scene that met her eyes was one of greater desolation still. It was a circular plot of ground, fenced round by a low stone wall that was surmounted by spiked railings. It looked as though it might have been once a flower garden, but it was now a wilderness. Outside its boundary rose the rare and beautiful trees of the happy tended shrubberies. Inside were nettles, brambles, and long weedy grass. Nothing else was visible in this melancholy

enclosure but three cypresses, apparently of various ages, the two smaller planted near together, the third, and by far the largest, standing apart by itself.

Miss Merton was quite at a loss what to make of the strange spot; and, as Laurence was feeling in his pocket for the key, she asked him if it had anything to do with breeding pheasants.

‘Do you see what is written above the gate?’ said Laurence, as he pointed to a dim inscription whose letters still retained a glimmer of fading gold; ‘can you read it?’

Neque harum, quas colis, arborum
Te, præter invisam cupressum,
Ulla brevem dominum sequetur

“Of all these trees which you love so, the hated cypress only shall follow its master, and be faithful to him in his narrow house.” But come—let us go inside, if you are not afraid of the long grass.’

They passed through the gate, which gave a low wail upon its hinges, and Miss Merton followed Laurence, knee-deep in grass and nettles, to the smallest of the three cypress-trees. There Laurence paused. At the foot of the tree Miss Merton saw a flat slab of marble, with something written upon

it; and for the first time she felt certain that she must be in a place of graves.

‘This,’ said Laurence, pointing to the little cypress, ‘was planted only five years ago, ten days before the poor old man died who now sleeps under it. This is my uncle’s grave. Do you see the inscription?’

Omnis moriar, nullaque pars mei
Vitabit Libitinam.

“I shall wholly die, and there is no part of me that will escape the Venus of death.” That, and that alone, he chose to have written over him.’

Laurence spoke with some feeling, but Miss Merton was so much surprised that she hardly knew what response to make.

‘And does nobody take any care of this place?’ at last she said.

‘No,’ said Laurence. ‘By his own last orders, nobody. But come—you must look at this too.’ And he motioned her towards the neighbouring cypress.

At the foot of this, almost hidden by the long grass, Miss Merton saw something that surprised her still more strangely. It was the statue of a woman half reclining in a languid attitude on a block of hewn marble. The figure was full and beautiful, and the features

of the face were singularly fine; but there was something in the general effect that struck one at the first moment as not pleasing. What slight drapery there was, was disposed meretriciously over the rounded limbs; on the arms were heavy bracelets; one of the hands held a half-inverted wine-cup, and the other was laid negligently on a heap of coins. But what jarred most upon the feelings was the face, with its perfect features. For a cold sneer was fixed upon the full mouth and the fine nostrils; and the eyes, with a leer of petulant sensuality, seemed to be fixed for ever upon the flat neighbouring gravestone.

‘This cypress,’ said Laurence, ‘is much older than the other. It was planted twenty years ago; and twenty years ago the original of that statue was laid beneath it. She was one of those many nameless ladies—for, as you know, he completely exiled himself from society all the latter part of his life—who from time to time shared his fortunes at the house here. She was, too, by far the loveliest. She was at the same time the hardest, the most selfish, the most mercenary as well. And he knew it too. In spite of the distraction he found in her companionship, he was never for a moment deceived about her. At last, having made a fortune out of him, she was thinking of

leaving him. But one day, suddenly, she caught a chill and died. She died here, and here she was buried. That statue, as you may imagine, is his design not hers. The attitude, the drapery, the wine-cup held in one hand, and the money in the other, are according to his express direction; and by his direction, too, that face, with its lovely features, leers and sneers at him for ever, as he rests in his neglected grave. See, too, there is the epitaph which he chose for her:—

Lusisti satis, edisti satis, atque bibisti ;
Tempus abire tibi est.

“You have wantoned enough with me—you have eaten enough of my substance—you have drunk enough of my champagne; ’tis high time for you to go.” And now, ’said Laurence, ‘let us come to the third tree, and you shall see what is overshadowed by it.’

They passed across the enclosure to the largest of the three cypresses, and at the foot of that Miss Merton discovered a third gravestone, also with a poetical inscription. ‘That,’ said Laurence, ‘you can read without help of mine.’

Miss Merton looked; and the lines were not new to her:—

A slumber did my spirit seal,
I knew no mortal fears.
She seemed a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years.

She knows no motion now, nor force,
She neither feels nor sees,
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course
With rocks, and stones, and trees.

‘Here,’ said Laurence, ‘is the oldest grave of all. Its date is that of the tree that stands beside it, and that was planted forty years ago. Under that stone lies the only woman—except myself, almost the only thing—that the old man ever really loved. This was in his young days. He was only thirty when she died; and her death was the great turning-point of his life. She lived with him for two years, in a little cottage that stood on the very spot where he afterwards built the villa. She has no name, you see, on the grave-stone, and I had best not give her any. She was some one's wife, but not his. That is her story. I have her miniature somewhere, which one day I should like to show you. It is a lovely dark face, with liquid, spiritual eyes, and under it are written two lines of Byron's, which might have been composed for her :—

She walks in beauty like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies.

Well, there she lies now ; and the old man's youth lies buried with her. It was her death that made him a philosopher. He built this great place here, and laid out these gardens half to kill his grief for her, and half to keep alive her memory ; and here, as you see, he buried her. She gave up all that was best in her for the love of him. He gave up all that was best in him for the loss of her.'

'And is this place left quite uncared for ?' said Miss Merton, looking around her.

'It is left,' said Laurence, 'as he wished it should be. It was one of his most special orders that, when he was dead and buried, no further care of any kind should be spent on it. The grass and weeds were to be left to grow wild in it, the rails to rust, the portico to decay and crumble. "Do you think," he said to me, "that I know so little of life as to flatter myself that any single creature will regret me when I am gone, or even waste a thought upon me ? I do not chose, as Christians do, to rest for ever under a lie ; for their tombs are lying monuments that they are remembered ; mine shall be a true one that I am forgotten. Yes," he said, "it makes me laugh to think of myself—me, who have built this house and planted these gardens which others will enjoy—rotting

in the midst of it all, under thorns and brambles, in a little dismal wilderness. And then perhaps, Otho," he would say to me, "some of your friends who will walk about these gardens in a year or two—Christians, no doubt, with the devil knows what of fine sentiments about faith and immortality—will look in through the bars of the gate, and be shocked at that honest wilderness, that unconcealed neglect, which is the only real portion of those that have been." But during his last illness he softened just a little, and admitted that I, he did believe, cared for him, and might, when he was dead, every now and then think of him. "And so," he said, "if you like to do it, come every now and then, and scrape the moss from my inscription, and from the two others. But that is all I will have you do—that, and nothing more. That will express all that it is possible that you should feel for me." I promised him to do no more than that, and that I do. Poor old man!' Laurence went on meditatively, as they passed out of the gates, and were again in the bright trim garden. 'He thought that he belonged to times before his own; but I think that in reality he belonged to times after them. If he was Roman at all, as he always fancied himself, he was Roman only in that sombre ennui that

through all his later years oppressed him ; and which seems to me to be now settling down upon the world—an ennui that always kept him seeking for pleasures, and that turned the pleasures into ashes as soon as he possessed them. His pleasures were high and low ; but the higher made him despise the lower ; and the lower he sought simply that he might drown the higher. Two things only during his last years never palled upon him : one was, saying a sharp thing neatly ; the other, detecting some new weakness in human nature. In this he seemed really to revel. On the littlenesses and the pretences of men, especially when they turned out failures, he seemed to look with a passionate contemptuous fondness, like a wicked prince on a peasant-girl. See—here was his summer study—this stone pavilion. Let us go in for a moment, and I will show it to you.'

They were in front of a small quasi-classical building of white marble, embowered behind in arbutus and in myrtles, and commanding from its large windows a full view of the sea. Laurence unlocked the door, and he and Miss Merton entered.

Inside there was a faint musty smell, and a general sense that the place had been long disused. The walls were completely lined

with books in splendid bindings, whose gilded backs glimmered temptingly through the network of the bookcase doors. In the centre stood a table, covered with a cloth of faded crimson velvet; nothing on it but a tarnished ormolu inkstand, in the shape of a Roman temple, across the columns of which spiders had woven dusty webs. Placed stiffly before the table stood a gilded arm-chair, with cushions of crimson damask, and under it a foot-stool to match, which had been worn quite bare by the old philosopher's feet.

'Here,' said Laurence, 'he would sit day after day amongst his books, drawing, or reading, or writing, or looking out at his flowers or at the sea. Look! these two folios, bound in red morocco, are a collection of his verses, letters, essays and so on, that he had had privately printed. They are not all, I'm afraid, quite fit to read. But this first volume is all right. I should like to take it out and show it to you by-and-by. But come—I have nothing more to exhibit now. We had better join the others. They will not be far off,' he said, as they left the pavilion; 'indeed, I think I can hear them talking.'

In another moment they had passed through an arch of evergreens, and found themselves on the spot where nearly all the

rest of the party had already assembled, disposed in an easy group upon the grass. The place was an amphitheatre of velvet turf, set round with laurels and all kinds of shrubs; in the arena of which—if one may so speak—a little fountain splashed cool and restless in a porphyry basin. Overhead the blue summer sky was screened by the whispering shade of tall trees; and above the dark laurel-leaves the fresh sea was seen in the distance, an azure haze full of sparklings. The whole scene, as Miss Merton and Laurence, with his gorgeous folio under his arm, came upon it, was curiously picturesque. The various dresses made against the green turf a soft medley of colours. The ladies were in white and black and pale yellow, green and crimson and dove-colour. All the men, except Mr. Luke, were in shooting coats; and Mr. Saunders, who wore knickerbockers, had even pink stockings. And here, as the lights and shades flickered over them, and the gentle air breathed upon them, they seemed altogether like a party from which an imaginative on-looker might have expected a new Decameron.

Already, under Lady Grace's vigorous guidance, a certain amount of talk had begun *à propos* of the new Republic; all the ladies, with the exception of Mrs. Sinclair, having

fallen to discussing the true position of women, or rather of woman, and their opinions on this point being a little various. But besides this, the post had arrived; and that too had created some excitement. Lady Ambrose in particular had become delightfully radiant, on receiving a large envelope that was stiff as she handled it; and which she saw contained, as she just peeped into it, a card, on the top of which was printed, '*To have the honour to meet—*.' She had, too, just extracted from Lord Allen a promise to come and stay with her, next autumn, in the country; and her measure of good spirits was quite full.

'Now, Mr. Laurence,' she exclaimed, dangling her hat in her hand, 'do come and put a stop to this. You see what a woman's parliament would be if we ever have one, which my husband says is not at all impossible. Here is one of us who thinks that everything will go well if women can only learn to paint flowers on white dessert plates, and get fifteen shillings apiece for them.'

'And I,' said Lady Grace, smiling good-naturedly, 'was just saying that they all ought to be taught logic.'

'Perfectly true,' exclaimed Mr. Saunders, putting up his spectacles to see who had spoken.

'And Miss Merton,' said Lady Ambrose

‘thinks that we should all be taught to walk the hospitals, or be sick-nurses.’

‘I should not so much mind that,’ said Mrs. Sinclair, ‘in war time, if one had anyone fighting in whose life one really took an interest. I once thought, Mr. Leslie, that that might be my mission, perhaps.’

‘But,’ said Lady Ambrose, ‘how are we to build a castle in the air together, if we are all at cross purposes like this?’

There did indeed seem little prospect of their getting to work at all; until Leslie exclaimed at last that he thought he had found a way.

‘See,’ said Mrs. Sinclair, ‘I told you a little while ago you would be wanted to talk cleverly. And now, Mr. Leslie, don’t you think you would be more comfortable if you sat a little farther off? or Lady Grace, of whom I am already afraid, will begin to think we’re flirting.’

‘Well,’ said Leslie, ‘in spite of all our differences, I think I see a way in which we shall all be able to set to work together. We want to imagine a state that shall be as nearly perfect as we can make it. Well and good. Now, we shall all admit, I suppose, that in a perfect state all the parts will be perfect, and each part will imply and involve all the

others. Given one bone, we shall be able to construct the entire animal. Let us then take one part, and imagine that first. Let us take the highest class in our state, and see what we think that ought to be, looking on it in the first place not as a corporate body of superiors, but as an assembly of equals. Let us, I mean, to put it in other words, begin with seeing what we really wish society to be—what we really think that the highest and most refined life consists in, that is possible for the most favoured classes; and then let us see afterwards what is implied in this.'

Leslie's proposal was welcomed eagerly by everyone.

'Well,' said Lady Ambrose, 'and so we are each of us to say, are we, what we think is the essence of good society? Come then, who knows?'

'Art,' murmured Mr. Rose.

'Reason,' said Mr. Saunders.

'Unworldliness, based on knowledge of the world,' said Miss Merton.

'Wait a moment,' said Laurence, 'we are going too fast. This is not what Mr. Leslie means.'

'No, no,' said Mr. Saunders. 'Let us get rid of what is evil before we introduce what is good. I should begin by getting rid

of every belief that is not based upon reason, and every sentiment whose existence cannot be accounted for.'

'Here we are,' said Lady Ambrose, 'all over the place. Now if I might be allowed to say what I thought was the essence of good society, I should say that a great part of it, at least, was the absence of dull and vulgar people.'

'Excellent!' exclaimed Mr. Luke, 'and a capital exclusion with which to begin our new Republic.'

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

‘YES,’ said Mr. Luke still more solemnly, ‘if we only follow this out—this idea of the exclusion from our society of all vulgar and extraneous elements, we shall find we have done a great deal more than we may at first think. We shall have at once a free, and liberal, and untainted social and intellectual atmosphere, in which our thoughts, and feelings, and refinements, and ways of living, may develop themselves to the utmost, unimpeded. Lady Ambrose has certainly begun with hitting the right nail on the head.’

Could Lady Ambrose have been told, when she left London the afternoon before, that in another twenty-four hours she would be taking the lead in the construction of a Utopia, or ideal state of society, suggested by the writings of a Greek philosopher, she would have been utterly at a loss to know

what the prophecy meant; and had she known what it meant, she would certainly not have believed it. Indeed, as it was, she could hardly imagine that Mr. Luke was serious, and that he was not laughing at her; so she said quickly and in a tone of self-defence,

‘Of course I know that there must be something more than the mere exclusion of vulgar people, Mr. Luke. We must have religion, and all that, and——’

‘Ah!’ exclaimed Mr. Luke, interrupting her with a grand wave of the hand; ‘my dear Lady Ambrose, let us leave all that till by-and-by. Let us be content to begin with simpler matters first.’

‘Let us begin with the flowers of life,’ said Leslie, ‘and when we have chosen these, let us trace them back to their roots.’

‘I quite think,’ said Miss Merton, ‘that in a really good society—one that was perfectly good even in the superficial sense of the word—we should find, if we only had eyes enough, religion lurking somewhere, and everything else we want.’

‘And so that’s *your* view, my dear, is it?’ said Lady Ambrose. ‘Oh, then, I suppose since you, a Roman Catholic, think so, I may also.’

‘Surely, too,’ said Miss Merton, ‘we must

all know that nothing can be so bad, either for the pushers or the pushed, as the struggle of people to get into what they think is good society, not in the least because they care to be there, but merely because they care to be known to be there.'

Lady Ambrose, who perhaps felt unconsciously some small pricks of conscience here, again looked doubtful, and said, 'Still, if we really want to make a perfect state, this does not seem a very serious thing to begin with.'

'Listen,' exclaimed Laurence; 'let me read you something I have here—something of my uncle's, which I have just thought of. It is a short adaptation of Aristotle's *Ethics*.'

Lady Ambrose started. Hearing two words, the one as long as *Aristotle*, and the other as unfamiliar as *Ethics*, she began to think that she had made the conversation serious with a vengeance. Indeed, the whole party, as well as herself, showed some signs of surprise.

'It is very short,' said Laurence, 'and I will only read a page or two. It is called "A system of Ethics, adapted from Aristotle, for the use of the English Nation." It was suggested to him—' (and this bewildered Lady Ambrose still more, though at the same time it gave

her some gleam of hope), 'by a very rich vulgar family, who bought a place near here, and who much annoyed and amazed him by the great court they paid to him. This is the first chapter; it treats of "*The Summum Bonum, or The Moral End of Action.*" Listen—

'Ethics being the art and science of human action, as directed towards the chief good of life—that highest and final end, to which, if we think a little, we shall see all other ends are subordinate; it is evident that our first task must be, as our master Aristotle well says, to form a clear conception of what this end, the chief good, is.

Now on this point Aristotle would seem to err. For he, following the common opinion of men, affirms the chief good to be happiness, holding the only question to be, in what does true happiness lie? And if he had been philosophising for savages, he would indeed have been in the right. But because savages and men in a state of nature have all one end of action, which is happiness, it by no means follows that the same is true of civilised nations, and that these may not have ends that are far higher. It is indeed evident that they have. And not this only, but that of such ends there is a very great variety. To describe

and number these with anything like absolute accuracy is neither required nor admitted by the nature of the subject. But we shall be sufficiently near the truth if we say that there is a separate and characteristic chief good for each civilised nation—(quot gentes tot summa bona)—and that it is by this in each case that the national character is determined. A glance at the continent of Europe will at once illustrate this, and suggest examples to us of these national chief goods. We shall see the Germans, for instance, following what is called Thought to its inmost recesses, the French what is called Life. We shall find accordingly that the chief good of the former nation, which is perhaps the highest of all, is the knowledge of the unknowable; whilst that of the latter, which is next to it in dignity, is the practice of the unmentionable. And so on with all the other nations; each will be found to have its separate chief good; and none of these to have the least connection with happiness. For us, however, who are English, and writing for English readers, it will be enough to concern ourselves simply with the chief good of the English.

‘ We shall discover this, in the same way as we did that of the French and Germans, in an examination of our own special national

characteristic. First, however, we must be clear what this characteristic is; and here it will be well to take our neighbours' opinions of us as well as our own. If we inquire then in what light we present ourselves to the other European nations, we shall find that just as the Germans are known mainly as a profound nation, and the French as a prurient nation, so are we, in like manner, now known as a vulgar nation. And as this view of us exactly tallies with our own, it appears evident that the special national characteristic of the English is vulgarity, and that the chief good of the English is the final end that is aimed at by the English vulgar classes.

' This we affirm to be social distinction, to their admiration and pursuit of which is due that cardinal moral quality which they call worldliness in themselves, and snobbishness in their friends and enemies. And if any object that to a great part of the nation social distinction in its true sense is a thing unknown, and that to another part it is a thing that comes without being struggled for, and so in neither case can be the end of moral action, we shall answer them that to object this, is much the same as to argue that a peach-tree does not bear peaches because none are to be seen growing out of the roots; or that there is

no meaning in the Athanasian Creed because none is attached to it by the only people who use it ; or that there is no meaning in the dogma of the Pope's infallibility because its only possible meaning is repudiated by all those who defend it. For nothing will be found unless we seek it in its right place. And for the ethics of a nation we must look only in that part of the nation which is their proper sphere ; and that part is, as we have already shown, the vulgar part. And should any still imagine that if we thus limit the scope of our observation, we shall not be able to treat the subject exhaustively, we shall remind him that the vulgar classes, though not yet co-extensive with the nation, are still rapidly becoming so, vulgarity ascending and descending with equal certainty ; since on the one hand it ruins all society into which it contrives to enter ; whilst it thrives itself, on the other hand, on all society that contrives to enter into it. To it therefore our whole study may be confined. Nor lastly (for it is well to anticipate every possible objection), is there any need that even thus we should study those classes that naturally possess social distinction, that we may so learn in what its real essence consists ; since, if we do but observe facts, we shall see that ignorance of the whole inner nature of good society is the chief characteristic

of those who with most single-heartedness direct their lives towards getting into it. It will be enough then, without any further explanation, to lay it down that social distinction is the chief good, and the end of all moral action; nor can the Aristotelians say that this is in reality a mediate end, and sought for only because it leads to happiness; since so far are men from seeking social distinction for the sake of happiness, that they are perpetually renouncing happiness for the sake of social distinction.'

'Capital, Mr. Laurence!' exclaimed Lady Ambrose, breaking into a low silvery laugh, as soon as Laurence had ended. 'And how true that is about those people who really ruin the society into which they contrive to push themselves!'

Lord Allen, who caught Miss Merton's eye at this moment, gave a very faint smile.

'So you see,' said Laurence, 'that you were quite right, Lady Ambrose, by instinctively beginning with exclusion.'

'Still,' said Allen, 'I'm afraid that all this is rather selfish. These people who want to be so smart, are, I dare say, not much the worse because of it. Indeed, myself, I rather like a good snob now and then.'

'Well,' said Laurence, 'let me read a few

more paragraphs, and you will see. ‘*Such being the end,*’ he goes on, ‘*of all moral action, virtue or morality is that state of mind which desires this end; and virtuous or moral acts are those which help us on towards it, provided only that they are done with purpose. For acts done not with purpose, but by chance, are not to be held moral. Now the nature of purpose is well explained by Aristotle, when he says that its object is all such voluntary action as is the result of deliberation. And what then is the object of deliberation? Let us consider that: for men, it is evident, do not deliberate about all matters alike; since in addition to their continually not deliberating in cases when they ought, there are many matters about which deliberation is out of the question. Thus no one deliberates about what is in its nature immutable, as how to alter vulgarity of a people’s member of Parliament; nor about necessary things, as how to alleviate the misery of the starving poor; nor about things of chance, as how to prevent the dissemination of cholera; nor, again, about remote things which do not concern us, as, to use a former instance, how to alleviate the misery of the starving poor; nor does anyone deliberate about impossible things, as how to check the poisonous adulteration of food; nor about things that are*

past and lost, as how to do anything for the glory of England; nor, lastly, do we deliberate about things we do not care about, as how to get that lost glory back again. Deliberation, then, only takes place about such matters as our own agency can effect, and which we wish it should effect. Virtue, therefore, being thus based on deliberation, is manifestly not one of those things that come to us by nature whether we will or no; but it is acquired by habit. The genus of moral virtue is a habit. But what special sort of habit? and how does it differ from all other habits? Let us consider this.

‘ We must remember, first, that it is the office of every virtue to perfect that of which it is the virtue. Thus it is the virtue of a modern London house to be as badly built as possible and not be seen to be so; it is the virtue of an insured ship not to appear unseaworthy before she does so to the crew as she is foundering; and it is the virtue of butcher’s meat, groceries and so forth, not to appear unfit for human consumption. In the same way moral virtue, or the virtue of a man, is that which makes him appear to be one thing to the world, whilst in reality he is another. Such being the case, it is plain that in trying to be virtuous, we may, as in most other things, do

too much, or too little ; and what is right will be a mean lying between these two extremes. Now of means there are two kinds, the absolute and the relative, either of which we can find in anything that is continuous ; the former, as when we take the bisecting point in a straight line, which is for all men one and the same ; the latter, as when we take the mean point or thing with reference to ourselves, in which case it will differ with our different requirements. Thus, if three be too small a number, and seventy-five too great, simply as an arithmetical problem, we take thirty-nine to be the mean, which exceeds three by as much as it is exceeded by seventy-five ; but with reference to ourselves we cannot so decide. For thirty-nine articles of religion may be too few for the present Archbishop of Westminster, and three may be too many for the Dean. Or again between 100l. and 20l., the mean with regard to the matter itself would be 60l., but with regard to ourselves, not so. For 60l. would be too little to offer to a cook, and too much to offer to a curate. So in like manner that equality which constitutes moral virtue is not the absolute, but the relative mean. Moral virtue, then, we shall define to be a certain state, or habit of purpose, conforming in action to the relative mean, and adjusted to that mean as the worldly

or snobbish man would adjust it. At this point we shall pause a moment to make a very slight change in the accepted terminology of the subject. We have hitherto spoken of the virtue of the vulgar classes as being a mean. We consider, however, that our language will be less ambiguous, if we take another form of the same word, and agree to call it a meanness. Moral virtue, then, is a meanness lying between two vices, its extremes; the one vice being that of excess, the other that of defect. Thus it is possible for a habit of mind to be so unrestrained and vehement, that the acts it produces at once betray their motives and obtrude them on the observer; it is possible for it, also, on the other hand, to be so weak and nerveless as never to produce any acts at all. For instance, the habit of thought in a clergyman may be so strong and unrestrained as to lead him to speak his whole conclusions out, and so get deprived of his living; or on the other hand it may be so weak and undeveloped, that he comes to no conclusions at all, and so dies in a curacy; the meanness between these two extremes being what is called vagueness, or the absence of any defined opinions, which is a great merit, and leads, in the Established Church, to high preferment. So also with habits of action, the general name given to the true meanness is

worldliness, whercof the excess is snobbishness, and the defect independence: worldliness being in its essence the former of these, and in its aspect the latter. Whence it follows that we may yet further generally define the moral mcanness, as that which is inwardly one extreme, and which is outwardly the other.'

'Now,' said Laurence, 'though I don't suppose the writer of this really cared two straws whether the majority of people were mean and vulgar or no, there is a great deal of truth in what he says: and I think in our ideally good society one of the first things we want is that it shall be unmixed and genuine; I mean, all its members must be of it, as well as in it. They must give it its *prestige*. We must have none that merely get their *prestige* from it.'

'Well,' said Allen, 'no doubt this exclusion is better, if it could be only managed.'

'Don't let us think yet,' said Laurence, 'about how to manage it. Let us see what we want first, and see what it costs afterwards.'

'I certainly believe,' said Miss Merton, 'that what I consider the extremely bad manners of a great many very fine ladies would all go, if a stop were put to this jostling and scrambling that goes on about them, as Mr. Laurence proposes.'

‘See,’ said Laurence, ‘here is one good fruit of exclusion at once—the redemption of our manners; and a most important fruit too, I think; for I hope we all start with the understanding that our society, ideally good as it is, is above none of those outward graces and refinements of behaviour and ways of living that give us such pleasure now, when we find them.’

‘And manner too, Mr. Laurence,’ broke in Lady Ambrose, ‘as well as manners——Think what a charm there is in a really charming manner.’

‘There is indeed,’ exclaimed Mr. Stockton. ‘The dear Duchess of —— for instance—why, there’s a fascination even in the way in which she says good morning.’

‘Ah yes,’ said Lady Ambrose. ‘Now, there’s what I call a *really* perfect manner for you.’

‘Very well,’ said Laurence, ‘and whatever is a really perfect manner, in our ideal society we must all have it.’

‘I must confess,’ said Allen, ‘that I get very sick sometimes of our conventional society manners; and I often long to have a good genuine savage to talk to.’

‘That,’ said Laurence, ‘is because of all the social shams that we have just agreed to

get rid of. And to call the manner of society conventional, conveys no greater blame than if you were to call language conventional. For manner is but a second language, of which the best society speaks the purest dialect—the Attic, in fact. And as with language, so with manner, the more uniformity there is in it in some ways, the nicer shades of individuality shall we be able to express by it in others.'

'Well,' said Allen, shortly, 'perhaps it is so. You are very likely right.'

'And in manner,' said Laurence, 'I include *tone* too—that special and indescribable way of looking at things, and speaking of things, which characterises good society, and distinguishes it from the rest of the world so completely, and yet by marks so subtle that they would utterly escape the notice of those who don't know their meaning—that little extra stroke of polishing that brings to light such countless new delicate veins in the marble of life—the little extra stroke of the brush that puts a new refinement, and self-possession, into the face. As Browning says of a very different subject—

Oh, the little more, and how much it is,
And the little less, and what worlds away.

And this is something quite independent of any special ability or special quality on the part of the individual people themselves; though of course the more gifted and cultivated they are, the greater will its charm be.'

'Yes,' said Miss Merton thoughtfully, and half to herself, 'I think all that is quite true.'

'Of course,' said Laurence, 'I know that tone alone can only make society good in a very narrow sense of the word. I merely mean that no amount of other qualities can make it really good, without tone.'

'I don't in the least object,' said Allen, 'to the marble being polished; but what I want first to be sure of is, that it is worth polishing.'

'Quite so,' said Laurence. 'What we must now consider is, what are all those special qualities and accomplishments, which will make a really perfect society the best among the best—such things as wit, knowledge, experience, humour, and so on—the veins, in fact, in the marble, that can be brought out by the polish.'

'Ah, yes, my dear Laurence,' began Mr. Luke, 'this is the great thing that we shall have to decide about; and it is this very

thing that I am always telling the world is——'

But he was interrupted by the advent of Mr. Herbert, who, with the exception of Mr. Storke and Dr. Jenkinson, was the only member of the party not already there. Mr. Herbert's whole aspect surprised everyone. At luncheon, as all remembered, he had been melancholy and desponding; but his face now wore a bright smile, and there was something that was almost gaiety in his elastic step. No one, however, ventured to ask him the reason of this pleasing change; but as he held an open newspaper in his hand, which he had apparently just received, it occurred to most that he must have seen in it 'something to his advantage.'

'Well,' he exclaimed to Laurence, in a manner quite in keeping with his look, 'and tell me now how are you getting on with your new Republic? You ought to make a very beautiful thing out of it—all of you together, with so many charming ladies.'

'Do you think so?' said Laurence, in great surprise at this cheerful view of things.

'Yes,' answered Mr. Herbert, slowly and with decision. 'Ladies I always think, so long as they are good and honest, have

beautiful imaginations. And now, let me ask you how you have set to work.'

Laurence explained to him that they had begun, on Leslie's suggestion, with considering what society, or the life of the highest classes, would be at its best; and that they were going to see afterwards what was implied in this.

'Indeed!' said Mr. Herbert meditatively. 'Now, that is a really beautiful way of going about the business. And how far, let me ask you, have you got with your picture of these highest classes? I trust at all events that you have made a good beginning.'

'A beginning,' said Laurence, 'is all that we have made. We have agreed that our society is to have the utmost polish, ease, and grace of manner, and the completest *savoir-vivre*. It is, in fact, to be a sort of exemplar of human life at its highest conceivable completeness.'

'Excuse me,' said Mr. Herbert, 'but the ways of polite life, and the manners of fine ladies and gentlemen, are beautiful only as the expression of a beautiful spirit! They are altogether hateful as the ornament or the covering of a vile one.'

'Yes, Herbert, yes,' exclaimed Mr. Luke,

with a long sigh. ‘And I was just going to say this, when you joined us—that to make society really good—even really brilliant and entertaining—one thing is wanted, and that is true and genuine culture. *Then* let us have the polish by all means; but let it be a diamond we polish, and not a pebble. Our society must be one that does not merely dance, and hunt, and shoot. It must think, and reason, and read. It must be familiar—the whole of it must be familiar—with the great thoughts of the world, the great facts of the world, and the great books of the world. You want all this, if you would be perfectly brilliant in your *salons*, as well as really profound in your studies.’

This was assented to by nearly all. Lady Ambrose however looked a little uncomfortable, and not quite satisfied about something.

‘Don’t you think,’ she said at last, ‘that if everyone is to have so much culture, society will tend to become—well—just a little——’

‘Well, Lady Ambrose?’ said Laurence.

‘Well, just a little bit *blue*. It will be all too bookish, if you understand what I mean. Don’t you know when anyone comes to see you in London, and will talk of nothing but books, one always fancies it is because he isn’t

—it's very uncharitable to say so, but still it's true—because he isn't very much in society, and doesn't know many people to talk about ?'

'I always think it such a blessing,' said Lord Allen, 'to find anyone who will talk about books, and will not be perpetually boring one with vulgar gossip and scandal.'

'Oh, so do I,' said Lady Ambrose eagerly, 'but that was not what I meant exactly. Mr. Laurence knows what I mean; I'm sure he does. No one can delight in a book more than I; but still—' she said, pausing to think how much of what she considered culture was to be found in those London drawing-rooms where she felt her own life completest, 'still—somehow—' she said with a faint smile, 'it is possible to be too literary, isn't it, as well as too anything else ?'

'Perfectly true, Lady Ambrose,' said Mr. Luke—Lady Ambrose was delighted—'people continually *are* too literary—to my cost I know it; and that is because the world at large—what is called the reading world even more than the non-reading world—are hopelessly at sea as to what books are, and what they really do for us. In other words, if you will forgive my harping as I do upon a single expression, they lack culture.'

'Why, I thought culture *was* books and

literariness, and all that,' Lady Ambrose murmured half aloud, with a look of bewilderment. Mr. Herbert however suddenly came to her rescue.

'Now, all this,' he said, 'is most interesting; but I feel myself, something as I imagine Lady Ambrose does, that I should like to know a little more clearly what culture is, and what you mean by it, when you call it the essence of good society.'

'Yes,' said Lady Ambrose, 'this is just what I like. Come, Mr. Luke, suppose you were to tell us.'


'Suppose,' said Mr. Luke with an august wave of his hand, 'instead of that we ask Mr. Laurence to tell us. No one can do so better than he. I, Lady Ambrose, have perhaps grown something too much of a specialist to be able to put these things in a sufficiently popular way.'

'Ah,' said Mr. Herbert, 'this is really nice. I shall like to listen to this. But you must allow me to be merely a listener, and not ask me for instruction. I assure you I am here altogether to be instructed.'

Laurence, with some diffidence, assented to what was asked of him; and there was a general rustling on all sides of the party settling themselves down more luxuriously on the

grass. Every influence of the summer afternoon conspired to make all take kindly to the topic—the living airy whisper of the leaves overhead, the wandering scents of the flowers that the breeze just made perceptible, the musical splash of the fountain in its quiet restlessness, the luxury of the mossy turf as soft as sleep or rose-leaves, and a far faint murmur of church-bells that now and then invaded the ear gently, like a vague appealing dream. Mr. Saunders even was caressed by his flattered senses into peacefulness; the high and dry light of the intellect ceased to scintillate in his eyes; the spirit of progress condescended to take a temporary doze.

CHAPTER II.

‘ND now, Mr. Laurence,’ said Lady Ambrose, ‘begin at the beginning, please, and don’t do as Lord Kennington did at the Eton and Harrow match the other day—go talking to me about “overs,” and “long-stops,” and things like that, before I was even quite sure of the difference between “out” and “in.”’

‘Of course,’ Laurence began, smiling with a little prefatory shyness, ‘we can all understand the difference between a coarse common rustic palate, like that of the burly farmer, for instance, who just enjoys food in a brute way when he is hungry, and drink so long as it is spirituous at all times; and the palate of the true epicure, that is sensitive to taste as the nicest ear is to music, and can discriminate perfectly all the subtle semitones and chords of flavour. Well, transfer this image from the mouth to the mind, and there’s the whole thing in a nutshell. There is culture and no culture. A person is really

cultivated when he can taste not only the broad flavours of life—gulping its joys and sorrows down, either with a vulgar grimace of disgust, or an equally vulgar hearty voracity; but when with a delicate self-possession he appreciates all the subtler taste of things, when he discriminates between joy and joy, between sorrow and sorrow, between love and love, between career and career; discerning in all incidents and emotions their beauty, their pathos, their absurdity, or their tragedy, as the case may be.'

'You mean, then,' said Miss Merton, 'that a man of the highest culture is a sort of emotional *bon vivant*?''

'That surely is hardly a fair way—' began Laurence.

'Excuse me, my dear Laurence,' broke in Mr Luke, in his most magnificent of manners, 'it is perfectly fair—it is admirably fair. Emotional *bon vivant*!' he exclaimed. 'I thank Miss Merton for teaching me that word! for it may remind us all,' Mr. Luke continued, drawing out his words slowly, as if he liked the taste of them, 'how near our view of the matter is to that of a certain Galilean peasant—of whom Miss Merton has perhaps heard—who described the highest culture by just the same metaphor, as a

hunger and a thirst after righteousness. Our notion of it differs only from his, from the *Zeitgeist* having made it somewhat wider.'

Miss Merton, in her inmost soul, did anything but return Mr. Luke's compliment, and consider his comment on her words as either admirably or perfectly fair. However, she held her peace. The thoughts of Lady Ambrose had been flowing in a slightly different direction.

'But what I want to ask,' she said, 'is this. I want to know why it is that whenever one hears it said, "Oh, So-and-so is a very *cultivated* person," one always expects to find him—well, almost half professional as it were, or at least able to talk of nothing but music, or painting, or books? I mean, a man who's *merely* a cultivated person doesn't seem ever to be quite a man of the world, or to be much good in society, except when one wants him to talk on his own subjects—I hate people myself who *have* subjects—and then, ten to one, he doesn't know when to leave off. Now, Mr. Laurence, I see you want to interrupt me; but do let me say my say. A right amount of culture is of course delightful, and personally, I don't much care for people who haven't got it. But too much of it—I'm sure, Mr. Laurence, you must agree with me at

heart—is a mistake. And that, you know, is all I mean about it; nothing more than that.'

'Ah,' said Laurence, smiling, 'I think I see what it is. You *will* look on culture as some special kind of accomplishment or taste, like music; and you think that in some special way it is bound up with books; and books you look upon as something special also, beginning and ending with themselves; and, unless I am much mistaken, you think that the more books a man has read, the more cultivated you may safely call him.'

'Not all books,' said Lady Ambrose in an injured tone. 'Of course I don't mean trashy novels, and of course I don't mean blue-books, or books of history.'

'But what I want first of all to impress on you,' said Laurence, 'is that whatever its relation to books may be, culture is by no means a bookish thing, or a thing that ought to be less in place at Hurlingham than at the South Kensington Museum. Nor is it in any sense a hobby, or a special taste, to be gratified at the expense of anything else. Instead of that, it is the education of all our tastes, of all our powers of enjoying life; and, so far from its being a thing for recluses, and a substitute for society, it is only when natu-

ralised in the best society that it can at all do itself justice in expressing itself outwardly, or even exist in any completeness inwardly.'

Lady Ambrose smiled, and looked more interested, and began to give Laurence her most intelligent attention.

'Still,' Laurence went on, 'culture and books have a good deal to do with one another; and since they are so bound up together in your mind, let us try to see at once what the relation really is. Let us begin, then, with that part of culture which in this sense is most bound up with books—most bound up because it cannot be got without them; the part of culture, I mean, that comes from the knowledge of the past—from a knowledge of history, in short, or parts of history.'

Lady Ambrose here took Laurence fairly aback by the way in which she repeated the word 'History!'

'Well, judging from the results I have seen,' she said, with an amount of decision in her voice that was positively startling, 'I cannot say, Mr. Laurence, that I agree with you. And I think that on this subject I have a right to speak.'

'What on earth *can* the woman be meaning?' said Mr. Luke to himself.

'It is not a fortnight ago,' Lady Ambrose

went on, 'that I sat at dinner by somebody—I won't tell you his name—who had not only read heaven knows how much history, but had written, I believe, even more than he had read. And what do you think this good man did during all the early part of dinner? Why, he did nothing but fume, and fret, and bluster, so that everyone was made uncomfortable, simply because somebody said that King Harold was not quite so excellent a character as the late Prince Consort; and I heard him muttering, "What monstrous injustice! What monstrous ignorance!" to himself for nearly half an hour. I don't think I ever saw such a—I was going to say,' said Lady Ambrose, laughing softly, 'such a beast—but I won't; I'll say a bear instead. At last, however—I don't know how it came about—he said to me, in a very solemn voice, "What a terrible defeat that was which we had at Bouvines!" I answered timidly—not thinking we were at war with anyone—that I had seen nothing about it in the papers. "H'm!" he said, giving a sort of a grunt that made me feel dreadfully ignorant, "why, I had an Excursus on it myself in the 'Archæological Gazette,' only last week." And, do you know, it turned out that the Battle of Bouvines was fought in the

thirteenth century, and had, as far as I could make out, something to do with Magna Charta. Now, Mr. Laurence, if that's the sort of culture one gets from studying history, I'm glad I've forgotten even the names of the twelve Cæsars, and the dates of the kings of England. Besides,' Lady Ambrose added, 'it makes one think what a serious thing it is to lose a battle, if people are to be made so cross about it six hundred years afterwards.'

'I quite agree with you,' said Laurence, 'that if that's the sort of culture one gets from history, we had better never open a history book again. But history, Lady Ambrose, has very little to do with the Battle of Bouvines, and nothing with the character of Harold.'

'Then what has it got to do with?' asked Lady Ambrose incredulously. 'It certainly has to do with kings, and wars, and facts, and dates, hasn't it?'

'What people call facts,' said Laurence, 'are only the dry bones of history. It is quite true that most professed historians have hitherto, instead of painting the face of the past, simply made discrepant notes about the shape of its skull: everything that could give the shape of the skull the least signifi-

cance they left unthought of, or dismissed it in an occasional chapter. But really the least important of all the world's events are those that you can localise exactly, and put an exact date to; those which alone most historians see.'

'But,' interposed Miss Merton, 'don't you call such things as the events in Cæsar's life, for instance, or Hildebrand's, history?'

'Looked on simply as events,' said Laurence, 'I call them biography, or I call them *illustrations* of history; but I do not call them history. History, in its true sense, is a travelling in the past; the best of histories would be but the carriage or the steamboat you travelled by; your histories of dates and battles are at best but the Bradshaws and the railway-maps. Our past must be an extension of the present, or it is no real past. Now I expect, Lady Ambrose, that, in its true sense, you know a good deal more history than you are aware of. I saw you reading Saint-Simon yesterday evening, and you alluded to Grammont's Memoirs at dinner.'

'Oh, of course,' said Lady Ambrose, 'books like that! But, then, they really give you such a notion of the times, and quite take you back to them.'

‘Nothing is history that does not,’ said Laurence.

‘Really,’ exclaimed Lady Ambrose, brightening. “Il y a plus de vingt ans que je dis de la prose, sans que j’en susse rien.” And so it seems that I have known history without suspecting it, just as M. Jourdain talked prose.’

‘Pardon me,’ cried Mr. Saunders, ‘if I interrupt you for a moment; but, Mr. Laurence, though I admit that there is a great deal of truth in what you say, you have not even alluded to the great function of history, nor have you even hinted at the great use of facts. However, perhaps I had better reserve what I have to say on this, as well as on certain other matters, till by-and-by.’

‘Very well,’ said Laurence, ‘if history, then, is a travelling in the past—what else it is, as Mr. Saunders says, we can talk of afterwards—don’t you see what it does for us, Lady Ambrose, in the way of culture—does for us, not as students, but as men and women of the world? Just think for a moment what our own age would seem to us if all the past, beyond the memories of our grandfathers, was a blank to us; and then think how infinitely our minds are enlarged, how a

freer air, as it were, seems to blow through them, even from that vague knowledge of the past afloat in the world, which we pick up here and there as we go along. Even that has an effect upon us. It prevents us being, as we else should be, merely *temporal* people, who are just as narrow-minded and dull as those merely *local* people—the natives of a neighbourhood—who wear gorgeous ribands at flower-shows in the country. Don't you remember last year, when I was staying with you, how you pointed some of them out to me, and how amused you were at their ways and their finery?'

Lady Ambrose smiled and nodded.

'Go on, Mr. Laurence—I can understand all this,' she said. 'But I want to hear a little more.'

'Well,' said Laurence, 'your own knowledge of the history of France and England during the last two hundred years—you know well enough how that has made you, in a certain sense, more a woman of the world. What would you be, for instance, if you never knew that there had been a French Revolution, or an English Revolution—a Cromwell, or a Louis Quatorze, or a Mirabeau? But your knowledge of history does not end here. You know something, at any

rate, of the feudal times. You know what a castle was like, what a knight was like, what a monk was like. You know something, too, of Roman and Greek history; and, come—to go no farther—you know the Bible.’

‘I hope,’ said Lady Ambrose, in a voice of reproving solemnity, ‘that one would not call that history.’

‘Certainly not,’ said Mr. Saunders, with a small suppressed chuckle.

‘At all events,’ proceeded Laurence, ignoring these interruptions, ‘you know something of Rome, and Greece, and Palestine, and Egypt; and each of these names is really a little aërial chariot which carries your imagination back as you pronounce it into some remote age, when life was different from what it is now. So is the mind widened by even a little vague history. Or, just repeat to yourself such words as *France* and *Italy*, and think for a moment of the effect of them. They are not mere names—mere geographical expressions; but they are spells which evoke, whether you will or no, hosts of subtle associations, rising up like spirits out of the past centuries, and hovering in the air round you with their unbidden influence, and mixing with all your notions of Europe as it is now. Or, would you feel the matter

more strongly yet, think, when you are travelling, what but for history would Venice be, or Athens, or Jerusalem? If it were not for history, be it never so vaguely understood, would you find the same indescribable fascination in Rome?’

‘I never was at Rome,’ said Lady Ambrose. ‘We’re going there next winter with the Kenningtons.’

This piece of intelligence brought Laurence to a stop. Mr. Rose, however, whose imagination had been fired by all this talk about history, suddenly broke forth.

‘And also,’ he exclaimed, ‘is it not by history alone that we can in our day learn anything of the more subtle and gorgeous dyes that life is capable of taking—how fair a thing it may be, how rich in harmonious freedom, and beauty of form, and love, and passionate friendship? Why, but for history, what should we be now but a flock of listless barbarians, *ὄνειράτων ἀλίγκιοι μορφαῖσι φύρόντες εἰκῆ πάντα*? Would not all life’s choicer and subtler pleasures be lost to us, if Athens did not still live to redeem us from the bondage of the middle age, and if the Italian Renaissance—that strange child of Aphrodite and Tannhäuser, did not still live

to stimulate us out of the torpor of the present age? What, but for history, should we know,' cried Mr. Rose, 'of the χάρις of Greece, of the lust of Rome, of the strange secrets of the Borgias? Consider, too, the bowers of quiet, full of sweet dreams, that history will always keep for us—how it surrounds the house of the present with the boundless gardens of the past—gardens rich in woods, and waters, and flowers, and outlooks on illimitable seas. Think of the immortal dramas which history sets before us; of the keener and profounder passions which it shows in action, of the exquisite groups and figures it reveals to us, of nobler mould than ours—Harmodius and Aristogeiton, Achilles and Patroclus, David and Jonathan, our English Edward and the fair Piers Gaveston, ἄμα τ' ὠκύμορος καὶ οἰζυρὸς περὶ πάντων, or, above all, those two by the agnus castus and the plane-tree where Ilyssus flowed,'—Mr. Rose's voice gradually subsided,—'and where the Attic grasshoppers chirped in shrill summer choir.'

'At any rate, Lady Ambrose,' Laurence resumed briskly, 'you now see something of the way in which history gives us culture; and you see, too,—this is the chief point I want to impress upon you,—that in history,

and many other things as well, books are only the telescopes through which we see distant facts ; and we no more become *bookish* by such a use of books than you became *optical* when you looked through your telescope in Gloucestershire, and saw Captain Audley, at the bottom of the park, proposing to your under-keeper's daughter.'

'I really do believe,' said Lady Ambrose, 'that that man is a little off his head. However,' she went on laughing, 'I give up about the bookishness, Mr. Laurence, and I dare say one really is the better for knowing something about history ; but still, I can't help thinking that the chief thing to know about is, after all, the life about one, and that knowledge, just like charity, should begin at home.'

'There,' said Laurence, 'we quite agree ; and that, if I managed to express myself clearly, was the very thing that I set out with saying. It is with the life about us that all our concern lies ; and culture's double end is simply this—to make us appreciate that life, and to make that life worth appreciating. We only study the past to adorn our present, or to make our view of it clearer. And now, since we have at any rate suggested how this is done, let us put the past, and the distant too—everything,

in fact, to which books are only the telescopes—out of our minds altogether, and merely consider the real heart of the matter—culture and the present. I tried to explain just now that we meant by a man of culture one on whom none of the finer flavours of life are lost—who can appreciate, sympathise with, criticise, all the scenes, situations, sayings, or actions around him—a sad or happy love-affair, a charm of manner and conversation, a beautiful sunset, or a social absurdity. I declare,' said Laurence, 'I could tell better whether a man was really cultivated, from the way in which he talked gossip, or told a story, than from the way in which he discussed a poem or a picture.'

'Certainly,' said Leslie. 'I don't call a woman cultivated who bothers me at dinner first with discussing this book and then that—whose one perpetual question is, "Have you read So-and-so?" But I call a woman cultivated who responds and who knows what I mean as we pass naturally from subject to subject—who by a flash or a softness in her eyes, by a slight gesture of the hand, by a sigh, by a flush in the cheek, makes me feel as I talk of some lovely scene that she too could love it—as I speak of love or sorrow, makes me feel that she herself has

known them ; as I speak of ambition, or *ennui*, or hope, or remorse, or loss of character, makes me feel that all these are not mere names to her, but things.'

'Do you call *me* cultivated, Mr. Leslie?' whispered Mrs. Sinclair, in a soft parenthesis.

'I mean,' said Leslie, finishing, 'I like to hear each key I touch make, not a dead thud, as on a piece of wood, but strike a musical string.'

'Good,' murmured Mr. Rose; 'that is good! Yes,' he continued, 'the aim of culture, if Mr. Leslie will lend me his nice metaphor, is indeed to make the soul a musical instrument, which may yield music either to itself or to others, at any appulse from without; and the more elaborate a man's culture is, the richer and more composite can this music be. The minds of some men are like a simple pastoral reed. Only single melodies, and these unaccompanied, can be played upon them—glad or sad; whilst the minds of others, who look at things from countless points of view, and realise, as Shakespeare did, their composite nature—their minds become, as Shakespeare's was, like a great orchestra. Or sometimes,' said Mr. Rose dreamily, as if his talk was lapsing into a

soliloquy, 'when he is a mere passive observer of things, letting impressions from without move him as they will, I would compare the man of culture to an Æolian harp, which the winds at will play through—a beautiful face, a rainbow, a ruined temple, a death-bed, or a line of poetry, wandering in like a breath of air amongst the chords of his soul, touching note after note into soft music, and at last gently dying away into silence.'

'Well, now,' said Laurence, in a very matter-of-fact tone, for he saw that Mr. Rose's dreamy manner always tended to confuse Lady Ambrose, 'since we are now clear that the aim of culture is to make us better company as men and women of the world, let us consider a little farther how culture is attained. We have just spoken of histories and other books, which merely bring us face to face with facts that would else be out of our reach. We now come to two other things—the facts of the life about us, the facts which experience teaches us, and to which all other facts are secondary; and, farther, to the way in which all this knowledge—the knowledge of the living present especially—is (for we have really not talked of this at all yet) turned into culture. Mere acquaintance

with facts will not do it ; mere experience of facts will not do it. A woman, for instance, may have had all kinds of experience—society, sorrow, love, travel, remorse, distraction—and yet she may not be cultivated. She may have gone through everything only half consciously. She may never have recognised what her life has been. What is needed to teach her—to turn this raw material into culture ? Here, Lady Ambrose, we come to our friends the books again—not, however, to such books as histories, but to books of art, to poetry, and books akin to poetry. The former do but enlarge our own common experience. The latter are an experience in themselves, and an experience that interprets all former experiences. The mind, if I may borrow an illustration from photography, is a sensitised plate, always ready to receive the images made by experience on it. Poetry is the developing solution, which first makes these images visible. Or, to put it in another way, if some books are the telescopes with which we look at distant facts, poetry—I use the word in its widest sense—is a magic mirror which shows us the facts about us reflected in it as no telescope or microscope could show them to us. Let a person of experience look into this, and experience then

becomes culture. For in that magic mirror we see our life surrounded with issues viewless to the common eye. We see it compassed about with chariots of fire and with horses of fire. Then we know the real aspect of our joys and sorrows. We see the lineaments, we look into the eyes of thoughts, and desires, and associations, which had been before unseen and scarcely suspected presences—dim swarms clustering around our every action. Then how all kinds of objects and of feelings begin to cling together in our minds! A single sense or a single memory is touched, and a thrill runs through countless others. The smell of autumn woods, the colour of dying fern, may turn by a subtle transubstantiation into pleasures and faces that will never come again—a red sunset and a windy sea-shore into a last farewell, and the regret of a lifetime.'

Laurence had chosen these illustrations of his quite at random; but he was fortunate in the last in a way which he never dreamt of. Lady Ambrose, in her early and unwise days, had actually had a love-affair. She had been engaged to a handsome young Guardsman, with only eleven hundred a year, and no prospects but debts; and though she had successfully exchanged him for Sir George

and his million of money, she still sometimes recalled him, and the wild September evening when she had seen her last of him upon Worthing pier.

‘Ah,’ she exclaimed, with some emotion in her voice, ‘I know exactly what you mean now. Why, there have been poems at one time or another of one’s life, that one could really hardly bear to hear repeated. Now, there’s that of Byron’s, “When we two parted.” I don’t even know if it is right to think it a good poem—but still, do you know, there was a time when, just because it was connected with something—it almost made me cry if anyone repeated or sang it—one of my brothers, I know, who had a beautiful voice, was always ——’ Lady Ambrose here grew conscious that she was showing more feeling than she thought at all becoming. She blushed, she stammered a little, and then, making a rush at another topic, ‘But what is Mr. Rose,’ she exclaimed, ‘saying about the Clock-tower and the Thames Embankment?’

‘I was merely thinking,’ said Mr. Rose, who had been murmuring to himself at intervals for some time, ‘of a delicious walk I took last week, by the river side, between Charing Cross and Westminster. The great clock struck the chimes of midnight; a cool

wind blew ; and there went streaming on the wide wild waters with long vistas of reflected lights wavering and quivering in them ; and I roamed about for hours, hoping I might see some unfortunate cast herself from the Bridge of Sighs. It was a night I thought well in harmony with despair. Fancy,' exclaimed Mr. Rose, 'the infinity of emotions which the sad sudden splash in the dark river would awaken in one's mind—and all due to that one poem of Hood's !'

'Yes,' said Laurence, not having listened to Mr. Rose, who spoke, indeed, somewhat low, 'Yes,' he said, continuing the same train of thought he had left off with, and looking first at Lady Ambrose and then at Miss Merton, 'is it not poetry that does all this for the world ? I use poetry in its widest sense, and include in it all imaginative literature, and other art as well. Is it not the poet that gives our existence all its deepest colours, or enables us to give them to it ourselves ? Is it not—if I may quote a translation of Goethe that I made myself—

*Is't not the harmony that from his bosom springs,
And back into itself the whole world brings ?
When Nature round her spindle, cold and strong,
Winds on and on the endless threads of things ;
When all existences, a tuneless throng,
Make discord as with jangling strings,*

*Whose life-breath bids the flux of blind creation
 Move to a rhythmic music of his own ?
 Who calls each single thing to the common consecration,
 When rapturously it trembles into tone ?
 Who sets our wild moods and the storms in tune ?
 Our sad moods, and the still eve's crimson glow ?
 Who showers down all the loveliest flowers of June,
 Where she, the heart's beloved, will go ?
 Who, of a few green leaves in silly twine,
 Makes toil's immortal guerdon, art's reward,
 Raises the mortal, draws down the divine ?
 The power of man incarnate in the bard.¹*

And so, Laurence went on, 'if it is to the bard that we owe all these fine things, we need surely not fear that we shall be thought bookish if we say that a society cannot be really good that does not as a body draw a large amount of its nourishment from the bard's work. Of course in one sense poetry exists unwritten; but in the general run of people this will never properly awake itself, make itself available, but at the spell of written poetry. Nay, this is true even of the poet himself. Why else does he externalise his feelings—give them a body? As I say, however, the general catholic use of poetry is not to make us admire the poetry of poems but discern the poetry of life. I myself, Laurence went on, 'am devoted to literature

¹ Vide *Faust*, Prologue for the Theatre.

as literature, to poetry as poetry. I value it not only because it makes me appreciate the originals of the things it deals with, but for itself. I often like the description of a sunset better than I like a sunset; I don't care two straws about Liberty, but my mind is often set all aglow by a good ode to her. I delight in, I can talk over, I can brood over, the form of a stanza, the music of a line, the turn of a phrase, the flavour of an epithet. Few things give me such pleasure for the moment as an apt quotation from Horace or Shakespeare. But this, I admit, is a hobby—a private hobby—this distinct literary taste, just as a taste for blue china is, and must certainly not be confused with culture in its deeper and wider sense.'

'Ah,' said Mr. Rose earnestly, 'don't despise this merely literary culture, as you call it, or the pleasure it is to have at command a beautiful quotation. As I have been lying on the bank here, this afternoon, and looking up into the trees, and watching the blue sky, glancing between the leaves of them—as I have been listening to the hum of the insects, or looking out with half-shut eyes towards the sea across the green rustling shrubs, and the red rose-blossoms, fragments of poetry have been murmuring in my memory like a

swarm of bees, and have been carrying my fancy hither and thither in all manner of swift luxurious ways. The "spreading favour," for instance, of these trees that we sit under, brought just now into my mind those magical words of Virgil's—

O qui me gelidis in vallibus Haemi
Sistat, et ingenti ramorum protegat umbrâ!

What a picture there! What a thrill it sent all through me, like a rush of enchanted wind! In another moment the verse that goes just before, also came to me—

Virginibus bacchata Lacaenis
Taygeta—

and into the delicious scene now around me—this beautiful modern garden—mixed instantly visions of Greek mountains, and ragged summits, and choirs of Laconian maidens maddened with a divine enthusiasm, and with fair white vesture wildly floating. Again, another line from the same poem, from the same passage, touched my memory, and changed, in a moment, the whole complexion of my feelings—

Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas.

Think of that! The spirit is whirled away in a moment of time, and set amongst quite new images, quite other sources of

excitement. But again, in an instant, the splash of the fountain caught my ear, and awoke, I scarcely know how, the memory of some lines in one of Petrarch's Epistles—

Soporifero clausam qui murmure vallem
Implet inexhausto descendens alveus amne—

and my imagination, on the wings of the verses, was borne away floating towards Vaucluse. Think, then, within the space of five minutes how many thoughts and sensations, composite and crowded, can, by the agency of mere literature, enrich the mind, and make life intenser.'

'And I—' said Laurence, smiling,—'do you see that far-away sail out on the horizon line?—well, I caught myself murmuring over a scrap of Milton, only two minutes ago—

As when afar at sea a fleet descried
Hangs in the clouds, by equinoctial gales
Close sailing from Bengala.

Why, I could go on capping verses with you the whole afternoon, if we had nothing else to do. But besides this, a knowledge of books as books has got another use. How it enriches conversation, by enabling us to talk by hints and allusions, and to convey so many more meanings than our actual words

express. I came across an exquisite instance of this the other day, in a book of anecdotes about the poet Rogers, which shows how a familiarity with the scenes even of Greek poetry may give a brilliance to fashionable talk in the nineteenth century. One evening at Miss Lydia White's—she was a Tory, and well known then in society—a guest who was a Whig, said *à propos* of the depressed state of his own party at the time, "There is nothing left for us but to sacrifice a Tory virgin." "Yes," said Miss Lydia White, "I believe there's nothing the Whigs wouldn't do *to raise the wind*." But yet, after all, this is not *the* important thing, and I hope Lady Ambrose will forgive us for having talked so long about it.'

'And so one *must* read a great deal, after all, to be really cultivated,' said Lady Ambrose, in a disappointed tone. 'You've made culture seem so nice, that I feel positively quite ashamed to think how seldom now I look at a line of poetry, except, of course, when anything new comes out, that everybody *must* read.'

'I don't think you need be afraid on that score,' said Leslie. 'If society is to be cultivated, it must, no doubt, read a good deal, as a body. But all its members need not.

With women especially, nothing startles me more than when I find sometimes how very far, if they have had any serious experience of the world and life, a very little poetry will go.'

'I expect,' said Miss Merton, 'that we are naturally more introspective than men, and so, in what concerns ourselves, a very little will make us cultivated; although we don't certainly get so easily as men that indifferent way of looking on life as a whole, which I suppose is what you call the dramatic spirit, and which people praise so in Shakespeare. But as to what Mr. Leslie says, I have so often myself noticed the same thing in girls—especially at times when they are passing into womanhood, without having made much of a success of youth. I remember one poor friend of mine, whose whole life seemed to become clear to her through just one line of Tennyson's—

My life has crept so long on a broken wing.

I suppose it was a sort of magic mirror to her as Mr. Laurence was saying just now.'

'I,' said Leslie, 'once knew some one at Baden, who spent half her time at the tables, as much the observed of all observers as Worth and her own strange beauty could

make her—she liked being stared at—and who was certainly not a woman who gave much of her time to reading. She was very wretched with her husband, and her name was far from being above the reach of gossip. Talking one day to her in a hardish flippant sort of way—a tone of talk which she affected to like—I alluded by some chance to Francesca di Rimini in Dante; and I shall never forget the tone in which she exclaimed, “Poor Francesca!”—its passion and its pathos. I was surprised that she had even looked into Dante: but she had; and that one passage had lit up her whole life for her—that one picture of the two lovers “going for ever on the accursed air.”

‘How nice of you, Mr. Leslie,’ said Mrs. Sinclair, ‘to remember my poor verses!’

‘Let us consider, too,’ said Laurence, ‘that poetry does not only enable us to appreciate what we have already experienced, but it puts us in the way of getting new experiences. This was Wordsworth’s special claim for poetry, that it widened our sympathies—widened them in some new direction—that it was ever giving us, in fact, not new quotations, but new culture.’

‘Ah, here,’ said Leslie, ‘is a thing that continually occurs to me. Just consider for

a moment the wonderful social effect of even so partial a thing as the culture that Wordsworth himself gave us. Consider the effect of it on a common worldly woman—let her be girl or matron—who without it would be nothing but a half mechanical creature, living, as far as her interests went, a wretched hand-to-mouth existence of thin distraction, or eager anxious scheming for herself or her daughters. Cultivate her, I say, just in this one direction—give her but this one fragment of culture, a love of Nature—and all the mean landscape of her mind will be lit up with a sudden beauty, as the beam of ideal sunshine breaks across it, with its “light that never was on sea or land.” I don’t say that such a woman will become better for this, but she will become more interesting. In a girl, however pretty, what is there to interest a man if he reads nothing in her face from night to night but that she is getting daily more worn and jaded in the search for a rich husband? Or even, to go a step higher, in the unthinking, uncultivated flirt, so common in every class of society—what is there in her that a man will not soon discover to be insipid and wearying?’

‘Surely,’ remonstrated Mrs. Sinclair plain-

tively, 'that rather depends on what she is like. I must stand up for my sex.'

'But give her,' Leslie went on, 'one genuine, one disinterested taste, and all is changed. If I had an audience about me of young ladies, whom it was not too late to advise—girls entering on the world, determined to run the worldly course, and to satisfy all the expectations of the most excellent and lowest-minded of chaperons, I would say this to them:—I have no doubt you are all ignorant; of course you are all vain. That to make a brilliant match is your great object, you all avow. A certain sort of flirting, of which the less said the better, is your most disinterested taste. I know all this (I should say), and I can't help it; nor do I ask you to alter one of these points for the better. But this I do ask you to do. Try to add something else to them. Try to win for yourselves one taste of a truer and deeper sort. Study Wordsworth, and some parts of Shelley; open out your sympathies, by their aid, in just one direction. Learn to love the sea, and the woods, and the wild flowers, with all their infinite changes of scent, and colour, and sound—the purple moor, the brown mountain stream, the rolling mists, the wild smell of the heather. Let these things grow

to "haunt you like a passion," learn in this way the art of

desiring

More in this world than any understand.

You'll perhaps find it a little dull at first; but go on, and don't be disheartened; and then—by-and-by—by-and-by, go and look in the looking-glass, and study your own face. Hasn't some new look, child, come into your eyes, and given them an expression—a something that they wanted before? Smile. Hasn't your smile some strange meaning in it that it never used to have? You are a little more melancholy, perhaps. But no matter. The melancholy is worth its cost. You are now a mystery. Men can't see through you at a glance as they did; and so, as Sterne says, "you have their curiosity on your side," and that alone—even that will have increased your value tenfold in our Babylonian marriage-market.'

'Well, Mr. Leslie,' said Lady Ambrose with severe gravity, 'if that's the way you'd talk to young ladies, I should be very careful you never spoke to any that I had anything to do with.'

'Many people, I know,' Leslie went on, passing by the rebuke, 'think that books and culture are a kind of substitute for life, and

that the real masters in the art of living have no need for this poor *pis-aller*. They only drive four-in-hand, or shoot, or dance, or run away with their friends' wives. But no mistake can be greater. Culture is not a substitute for life, but the key to it. It is really to the men of culture, to the men who have read and who have thought, that all exercise, all distractions, mental or bodily, moral or immoral, yield their finer keener pleasures. They are the men that husbands dread for their wives, and that fascinating people find fascinating.'

Lady Ambrose much disapproved of the tone of this speech ; but none the less, in a certain mysterious way, did it insidiously increase her appreciation of the value of culture ; and she felt that with Laurence at any rate she most thoroughly agreed, when he said by way of summing up,

'And so now I think we see what culture is, and the reason why it is essential to good society. We see that much as it depends on books, life is really the great thing it has to do with. It is the passions, the interests, the relations, the absurdities of life that it fits us to see into, to taste, to discriminate. And I think we see, too, that not only is culture essential to good society, but good society

also is essential to culture, and that there was therefore very good reason for the exclusiveness we began with. For in the first place I expect it requires certain natural advantages of position to look at and overlook life in that sympathetic and yet self-possessed way, which alone can give us a complete view of it. And in the next place, the more we discern in life, the more social polish shall we want to do justice to our discernment; and not polish only, but those far subtler things, tone and balance as well. I think it was the late Lord Lytton who remarked in one of his books, what an offensive thing gaiety was sure to be in any woman except one of the most perfect breeding. So too with humour—the greater sense of humour a well-bred man has, the more delightful he is; the greater sense of humour a vulgar man has, the more intolerable he is.’

The measure of Lady Ambrose’s assent was now almost complete. It remained, however, for Mrs. Sinclair to give the finishing touch.

‘I remember,’ she said softly and regretfully, ‘a friend of mine—he was killed afterwards, poor man, in a duel near Dresden—who once, when he was down for some weeks in the country fishing, fell desperately

in love with a certain rector's daughter, who sang, and painted, and read German, and had a beautiful figure as well. The mother at once saw what was in the wind, and asked him directly to come and lunch at the rectory. And there three things happened. First, the mother began telling him what very superior society there was in the neighbouring local town; "In fact, its tone," she said, "is *almost* like that of a cathedral town." Then the lovely daughter asked him if he was *partial* to boiled chicken; and then, a little later on—it was this that quite finished him, for the two first shocks he said he might have got over—in answer to some little common joke or other that he made, she told him, with a sort of arch smile—what do you think? why, that he was *saucy*.'

'I confess,' said Miss Merton, laughing, 'that it *would* take a very great deal of charm of some sort to make one get over that. At any rate, it's a comfort to think that the young ladies in our new Republic won't call their admirers "saucy."'

'Well,' said Laurence, 'and so we have got thus far—we have made our ideal society as highly bred, as highly educated, as polished, as sparkling, as graceful, as

easy, as dignified, as we can possibly imagine it. And now, what next ?'

There was a moment's pause.

'What I should want in a Utopia,' Allen broke in abruptly, 'would be something definite for the people to do, each in his own walk of life. What I should want would be some honest, definite, straightforward, religious belief that we might all live by, and that would connect what we did and went through here with something more important elsewhere. Without this, to start with,' he said, half sadly and half coldly, 'all life seems to me a mockery.'

'And are you quite sure,' said Laurence, with a slight sigh, 'that it is not a mockery ?'

Mr. Luke here saw an opening for which he had long been waiting.

CHAPTER III.

MY dear Laurence,' Mr. Luke began, 'of course human life is a mockery, if you leave out the one thing in it that is of real importance. And it is because you have done this, that Lord Allen thinks that culture is so little worth caring for, though I doubt, by the way, if he expressed quite accurately what I conclude him to have meant.' 'However,' said Mr. Luke, clearing his throat, and looking round at the general company, 'what was said about culture just now was perfectly right—perfectly right, and really capitally illustrated—as far as it went. The only fault was that, as I say, the most important point in the matter was entirely left out. It is quite true that culture is, as Mr. Laurence observed so happily, the sensitising of the mental palate—the making it a good taster. But a taster of what? Not only of social absurdities, or love affairs, or beautiful scenery, but of morality, of righteousness, of Christianity. The really profound work

of culture is to make us judges of these—judges able to tell in an instant real righteousness and real Christianity from pseudo-righteousness and pseudo-Christianity, so that we may swallow the true like the healing water of life, and reject the false like a sample of bad claret—that we may have, in fact, just the same horror of any doctrine or dogma that is contrary to sweet reason (such, for instance, he said confidentially to Lady Grace, ‘as that of eternal punishment) that we have for young ladies who call their friends “saucy,” or for young ladies’ mothers who look on a bishop’s palace as a focus of the most polite society. So I think, if you only all recognise this, that culture includes—in fact, essentially is—the discernment of true righteousness, of true morality, you need none of you fear that to a really cultivated society life will be in any danger of becoming a mockery.’

‘I was sorry,’ said Miss Merton in a low tone to Laurence, ‘to hear you say that just now, because I know you don’t mean it.’

Laurence, who had been sitting a little above her on the bank, moved quietly down, and placed himself at her side.

‘You make me feel ashamed of myself,’ he said to her, ‘when you speak like this.’

There was something in his manner which a little embarrassed Miss Merton. She looked down, and said nothing for a moment; and then, not having quite command of her voice, she answered him in a tone rather louder than she intended.

‘Well,’ she said, ‘and don’t you think that some definite faith or other is needed by the world?’

‘Yes, *I* think so; *I* think so. I entirely agree with Miss Merton,’ exclaimed somebody. But it was not Laurence. To the surprise of everyone, it was Mr. Saunders. All eyes were turned on him.

‘Will you allow me,’ he said, looking round him with a nervous eagerness, as though doubtful if he should gain a hearing, ‘will you allow me to make a few observations here—it will only take a moment—to remind you of just a *few* things which I think ought not to be lost sight of? Well,’ Mr. Saunders went on, as he seemed to have secured the ear of the house, ‘in the first place as to history, just one word. The main use of history, which Mr. Laurence forgot altogether to mention, is of course, as Comte has so well established, to teach us his philosophy of it—to show us, in other words, how entirely *non compos mentis* the world was till

our time, and that it is only in the present century that it has acquired the power of passing a reasonable judgment. And next, as to facts; mere facts, as facts, I think quite as useless as Mr. Laurence does, except for one reason. And that reason is the way in which from every side they confute, give the lie to, annihilate, the pretensions of revealed religion, and of the myths which it calls its history. This, however, by the way. It was not the chief thing that I wanted to say to you. Now, you all,' Mr. Saunders went on, holding up his forefinger and addressing the company, 'propose to form a picture of what the world ought to be—what I suppose you hope it will be; and you say, and very rightly, that the great secret is that it should appreciate properly the pleasures of human life. But, please mark this, you have quite ignored the most important thing of all—the vast change that all these pleasures are undergoing, that the whole aspect of life is undergoing, beneath the touch of modern thought and modern philosophy; nay—and this indeed is *the* special point I want to lay stress upon—Mr. Luke just now even used those obsolete and misleading words, righteousness and morality, soiled by so many unworthy associations. By the way,' he

exclaimed, stopping suddenly and looking round him, 'I suppose I may speak the truth freely, as I know well enough that all to whom my vaticinations would be unwelcome are sure to mistake me for a Cassandra.'

'Mistake him for a what?' said Lady Ambrose, in a loud undertone.

'She was a beautiful young unfortunate,' whispered Mrs. Sinclair confidentially, 'who was betrayed by the god Apollo.'

Mr. Saunders was conscious he had raised a smile. He considered it a full licence to proceed.

'Well,' he said, 'as Miss Merton remarked a moment ago, some definite faith is needed by the world; and, as I now deliberately declare, some definite faith it will have—some one definite faith that will tolerate no dissent from it; and it will have this before fifty years are over.'

Everyone stared at Mr. Saunders, everyone except Mr. Luke, who simply smiled at the sky, and said, with an air of suppressed pleasantry, 'I had imagined that our young friend's motto was *freedom*.'

Mr. Saunders was nettled at this beyond description. With a vindictive quickness he fixed his eyes upon Mr. Luke.

'Sight is free,' he said, uttering his words

very slowly, as if each one were a dagger in itself, and could give Mr. Luke a separate smart; 'sight is free,' he said, 'and yet the sight of all healthy men, I conceive, is in agreement. It differs, I admit, when our eyes are dim with tears of hysterical feeling; or when we are drunk; or when we are fighting—in this last case, Mr. Luke, I am told we are often visited with illuminations of a truly celestial radiance—but it is surely not such exceptional vision as this that you praise as free. And it is just the same,' said Mr. Saunders triumphantly, 'with the mind. The minds of men will never have been so free as on that not-distant day when they shall all agree. And what will that agreement result in? Why, in the utter banishment, the utter destruction—I know no word strong enough to express my meaning—of all mystery and of all mysticism, and consequently of that supposed inscrutable difference between right and wrong, which has been made, in the hands of the priests, one of the most hideous engines of terror that were ever employed to degrade and crush mankind. Right and wrong, indeed! Righteousness and morality! There is something insidious in their very sound. No — "useful," "healthful," "serviceable,"

“pleasant”—these will be the words of the future. Emancipated man will know no wrong, save unhealthiness and unpleasantness. That most treacherous handmaid of priestcraft, poetry, which, professing to heighten the lights of life, did, in reality, only deepen its shadows, will delude him no longer—she will be gone—gone for ever. Science, the liberator of humanity, will have cast its light upon her; and the lying vision will vanish. But why do I talk of poetry? Is not that, and every other evil—reverence, faith, mysticism, humility, and all the unclean company—comprised in this one word, Religion? Well, let religion—the *ancien régime* of the world—retire, as it has done, to its Versailles, and fence itself round for a little with its mercenary soldiers! The Paris of the world is, at any rate, left free—and there the Revolution of Humanity is begun. Science leads it, and in another fifty years there will not be another religion left. Surely most here must know this,’ continued Mr. Saunders, ‘although they may perhaps forget it sometimes. But the fact is notorious, and I really think——’

‘Sir!’

Where did that sudden, solemn exclamation come from—that single syllable at which

the music of Mr. Saunders's voice, 'like a fountain's sickening pulse,' retired in a moment. Who had spoken? The sound surprised everybody. It was Mr. Stockton—Mr. Stockton, with a face all aglow with feeling, beneath his picturesque wide-awake hat, and holding in his hand a white pocket-handkerchief bordered with pale blue.

'Perhaps,' he continued, looking slowly round him, 'I, as a man of science, who have been a patient apprentice at my work for six-and-twenty years, may be allowed to give some opinion on this matter. Destroy religion! Destroy poetry!' he exclaimed, in his rich, bell-like voice, that was now resonant with an indignant melancholy. 'Will science destroy either of these precious and exquisite heritages of the human race? Will it extinguish one profound, one ennobling, one devout feeling? Will it blight that rich culture on which the present age so justly prides itself? I have followed science for six-and-twenty years, I speak therefore from experience; and I boldly answer "No." How indeed should it? I know, I deplore, and I trust also forgive, the common notion that it does. But how can that notion have arisen? That is what puzzles me. Is not science

essentially religious, essentially poetical—nay, does it not deepen quite boundlessly the religion and poetry already existing in the world, and fuse the two together, as they were never fused before? Does it narrow our notions of life's wonder and dignity to peer into the abyss of being, and learn something of the marvellous laws of things—to discover the same mysterious Something in a snow-flake, in the scent of a rose, in the "topmost star of unascended heaven," and in some prayer or aspiration in the soul of man? True it is that this wondrous All is Matter, and that all matter is atoms in its last analysis. No idle metaphysics have clouded my brain, so I have been able to see these things clearly——'

'Yes, yes, yes,' cried Mr. Saunders, recovering himself, his voice tremulous with excitement, 'I know all that. I know that in their last analysis a pig and a martyr, a prayer and a beef-steak, are just the same—atoms and atomic movement. We, the younger generation of thinkers, accept all the premisses you give us without a moment's question. We only reason boldly and honestly on them, and I defy you to prove—Mr. Stockton, sir, if you will only listen to me——'

But there was little chance of that.

Interrupted only for a moment, and whilst Mr. Saunders was yet speaking, Mr. Stockton's eloquence swept on.

'Consider ourselves,' he said, 'consider the race of men, and note the truly celestial light that science throws on that. We have ascended,' said Mr. Stockton; 'noble thought! We have not descended. We are rising towards heaven, we have not fallen from it. Yes—we, with attributes so like an angel's, with understanding so like a God's—to this height we have already risen. Who knows what future may not be in store for us? And then, on the other hand, when the awe-struck eye gazes, guided by science, through the "dark backward and abysm of time," and sees that all that is has unfolded itself, unmoved and unbidden, (astounding thought!) from a brainless, senseless, lifeless gas—the cosmic vapour, as we call it—and that it may, for aught we know, one day return to it—I say, when we realise, when we truly make our own, this stupendous truth, must not our feelings,' said Mr. Stockton, letting his eyes rest on Miss Merton's with an appealing melancholy—'our feelings at such moments be religious? Are they not Religion?'

'But,' said Miss Merton, 'there is nothing

religious *in* a gas. I don't see how anything religious can come out of it.'

'Perfectly right!' chuckled Mr. Saunders, faintly clapping his hands. 'Nothing can come out of the sack but what's in it. Miss Merton's perfectly right.'

'Ah, Miss Merton,' Mr. Stockton continued, 'don't be frightened by the mere sound of the word *matter*. For who knows what matter is'—('Then, why talk about it?' shrilled Mr. Saunders, unheeded)—'that great Alpha and Omega of the Universe?' Mr. Stockton went on. 'And don't wrong me by thinking that I "palter with you in a double sense," and that I am not using the word *religion* in its truest, its profoundest signification. Do you think, Miss Merton, for instance, that I cannot feel with you, when, stirred to your inmost soul by some strain of Mozart or Beethoven, you kneel before your sacrificial altar, whilst the acolyte exalts the Host, and murmur with bowed head your litany to your beautiful Virgin? I say advisedly, Miss Merton, that I, as a man of science, can appreciate, and to a great extent share, your adoring—your adorable frame of mind.'

Mr. Stockton paused. His acquaintance with Catholic ritual, and the fact of thus find-

ing herself elected, without any merit of her own, as the special object of so great a man's eloquence, produced in Miss Merton an unfortunate sense of absurdity, and in another moment she was conscious of nothing but a most inappropriate desire to laugh. She compromised with her facial muscles, however, and only gave a smile, which she trusted would pass muster as one of grave enquiry. Mr. Stockton thought that it was so, and went on ; but, unknown to himself, he felt all the while that it was not so, and his enthusiasm, he could not tell why, became somewhat more polemical.

‘Does science, then,’ he proceeded, ‘rob us of one iota of religious feeling, or degrade our notions of life's measureless solemnity? Nay, it is rather the flippant conceptions of theology that would do that, by connecting everything with an eternal Personality—a personality so degraded as to have some connection with ourselves. The prayer of the theologian, “cabined, cribbed, confined” in spoken words, is directed to a Being that Science can make no room for, and would not want, if she could. The prayer of the man of science, for the most part of the silent sort, is directed whither? demands what? He is silent if you ask

him, for his answer would be beyond the reach of words. Even to hint at its nature he would feel were a profanity.'

'Do you know, Mr. Stockton,' said Miss Merton, this time with a polite meekness, 'all this rather bewilders me.'

'And so it does me,' said Mr. Stockton, much pleased with Miss Merton's manner; 'and this august bewilderment, which gives fulness and tone to our existence, but which we can neither analyse nor comprehend—to me comes in one shape, to you in another, and is—religion. In the name, then, of all genuine science, and of all serious scientific men, let man keep, I say,' said Mr. Stockton, looking round him, 'this precious and ennobling heritage—let him keep it and shape it ever anew, to meet his ever-changing and deepening needs. In *my* dream of the future I see religions not diminished, but multiplied, growing more and more richly diverse, as they sink deeper into individual souls. Surely, science, then, is not come to destroy the past, but to fulfil it—and I confess I can myself see no better way of discovering what we desire in the future than by the charming analysis Mr. Laurence has been giving us of what we most admire in the present.'

'See,' said Donald Gordon softly, 'here

is science on the one side offering us all religions, and on the other none.'

'Heigho!' sighed Mr. Luke, very loud; 'let us agree about *conduct* first, and quarrel about theology afterwards.'

'Precisely,' resumed Mr. Stockton, to Mr. Luke's extreme annoyance—Mr. Luke himself having still much to say, and considering that Mr. Stockton did but darken counsel by interrupting him—'Mr. Luke is perfectly right.' ('I should like to know how you know that,' thought Mr. Luke.) 'Let us agree about conduct—morality, by-the-by, is the plainer word—that is the great thing. Let us agree about the noble and the beautiful. Let us agree heroically to follow truth—ay, truth; let us follow that, I say, picking our way step by step, and not look where we are going. Let us follow—what can I add to this?—the incomparable life of the great Founder of Christianity. Yes, Miss Merton, entertaining the views that I do, I say the incomparable life. Such is the message of science to the world; such is the instinct of culture when enriched and quickened by science.'

This was literally taking the bread out of Mr. Luke's mouth. Not only was it repeating what he had said before, but it was anti-

icipating, in a formless undisciplined way, the very thing that he was going to say again. And the man who had robbed him thus was a mere Philistine—a mere man of science, who was without even a smattering of Greek or Hebrew, and who thought sensori-motor nerves and spontaneous generation more important subjects than Marcion's Gospel or the Psalms of David. For once in his life Mr. Luke was for the moment completely silenced. Laurence however somewhat soothed him, by replying to him, not to Mr. Stockton,

‘Yes, I believe I was wrong after all; and that true culture will really prevent us from looking on life as a mere mockery.’

Mr. Luke was going to have answered; but, worse even than Mr. Stockton's, Mr. Saunders's hated accents now got the start of him.

‘One word more,’ Mr. Saunders exclaimed, ‘one plain word if you will allow me. All this talk about Religion, Poetry, Morality, implies this—or it implies nothing—the recognition of some elements of inscrutable mystery in our lives and conduct; and to every mystery, to all mystery, science is the sworn, the deadly foe. What she is daily more and more branding into man's con-

sciousness is, that nothing is inscrutable that can practically concern man. Use, pleasure, self-preservation—on these everything depends; on these rocks of ages are all rules of conduct founded: and now that we have dug down to these foundations, what an entirely changed fabric of life shall we build upon them. Right and wrong, I again say, are entirely misleading terms; and the superstition that sees an unfathomable gulf yawning between them is the great bar to all healthful progress.'

'And I say, on the contrary,' said Laurence, replying very suavely to Mr. Saunders's vehemence, 'that it is on the recognition of this mysterious and unfathomable gulf that the whole of the higher pleasures of life depend—and the higher vicious pleasures as much as, if not more than, the virtuous.'

Lady Ambrose started at this.

'I am not vicious,' said Mr. Saunders snappishly. 'When I call pleasure the one criterion of action, I am thinking of very different pleasures from what you think I mean.'

'What is Mr. Saunders's notion of the most passionate pleasure?' said Mrs. Sinclair bewitchingly.

‘I agree with my great forerunner Hobbes,’ said Mr. Saunders, ‘that the strongest of all pleasures are those arising from the gratification of curiosity; and he is the real ethical philosopher who subordinates all other appetites to this, like Bacon, who lost his life through pursuing a scientific experiment, or’—he said pausing to think of another example—

‘Like Bluebeard’s wives?’ enquired Mrs. Sinclair naïvely. ‘I’m afraid I never give my husband his highest pleasure; for I never let him,’ she added in a regretful whisper, ‘open my letters, although I read all his. But, Mr. Saunders,’ she said, ‘if you are so fond of curiosity, you must have some mystery to excite it.’

‘Yes,’ said Mr. Saunders, ‘but mystery is a fox for us to hunt and shoot; not a God to hunt and shoot us.’

‘Fancy,’ exclaimed Lady Ambrose in horror, ‘shooting a fox! what sacrilege!’

This remark, so entirely spontaneous, and so entirely unexpected, produced a general laugh, in which all joined but Mr. Saunders himself, and Mr. Herbert.

‘Well,’ said Laurence at length, when the chorus had subsided, ‘may I read a certain letter of my uncle’s to myself, which is

printed in this very book I have here? It was running in my mind just now, and is about the very matter we were speaking of—the connection of religions, of Christian morality, with all the higher pleasures of life.’

‘Very good,’ said Mr. Saunders. ‘Read what you please. I can only say that I have at this moment in my portmanteau an analysis I have made of all the Christian moral sentiments, in which I trace every one of them to such disgusting or paltry origins as shall at once rob them of all their pestilent *prestige*. I begin with the main root, the great first parent of all these evils, the conception of God, which I show may have arisen in seventy-three different ways, each one more commonplace than the other. By-and-by, if you will not fear to confront the document, I will show it to you.’

Mr. Luke meanwhile had seen his way to bringing Mr. Stockton’s true ignorance home to him, and had been regretting to him, in tones of insidious confidence, that hardly enough stress had been laid just now on the necessity of really wide reading—‘an intimacy,’ said Mr. Luke, ‘with the great literatures of the world—a knowledge and comparison of the best things that have been said and thought, in all the various ages, on the

great questions of life, without which,' he added, 'as you and I know, that discrimination between right and wrong that we were speaking of just now, can never be anything more than a make-believe.' Nor did Mr. Luke seem at all aware, as he was thus proceeding, that Laurence had found his place, and had already begun to read, as follows :

'As I grow old, my dear Otho, I am coming to think over many things that I have hitherto thought too little about, and, amongst others, the great mystery of Christianity.'

At this point, however, Laurence and Mr. Luke were both interrupted by an entirely unforeseen event.

CHAPTER IV.

LAURENCE had just got to the end of the first sentence, and Mr. Luke at the same time was just reminding Mr. Stockton with some unction how impossible it was for us to value properly that curious mixture of trumpery and elevation, the 'Apocalypse' of John, unless we compared it with a very kindred work, the 'Pastor' of Hermas, when a servant startled Laurence by announcing in his ear the arrival of the vicar of the parish.

Everyone in dismay looked ; and there, standing a pace away in the background, the stranger was. He was an old man, very tall and spare, with an ascetic aspect, but with a carriage dignified though slightly stooping, and with severe, piercing eyes. The sudden embarrassment, however, which his apparition seemed to cause the party was relieved somewhat by Laurence's taking him aside as if for some private conversation, and also by another arrival of a far more genial

nature—that of servants with tea, piles of strawberries, iced coffee, and champagne cup. Mr. Rose at once bought himself golden opinions of Lady Grace by helping her page, a pretty boy with light curling hair, to arrange some tumblers on the grass. Mr. Stockton felt his spirits suddenly rise, and began asking Lady Violet what she thought of their new Republic as far as they had got with it.

‘I don’t know,’ she answered petulantly. ‘As far as I can see, you want everyone to read a great many books and to have only one opinion. For my part, I hate people who do the one, and a society that does the other.’

‘What a charming girl Lady Violet is!’ said Mr. Stockton to Lady Grace, as he stood by the tea table. ‘*Such* penetration! *such* vivacity! *such* originality!’

‘What beautiful sermons he does preach, to be sure!’ murmured Lady Ambrose.

‘Who? Who?’ enquired several voices.

‘Why, Dr. Seydon,’ said Lady Ambrose. ‘Don’t you know him? Have you never heard him in London—the gentleman with Mr. Laurence? See, he is coming back again to have some tea.’

It was indeed but too true. Mr. Luke’s

face in especial grew very blank. Mr. Saunders clenched his fist—a small one.

Dr. Seydon's face, on the contrary, wore what for it was a really gracious smile. He was mindful of how upon his arrival he had overheard the words 'Apocalypse' and 'mystery of Christianity.'

As Laurence introduced him into the circle Lady Ambrose at once claimed acquaintance with him, and made room for him at her side.

'I am sorry,' he said, looking round him with a singularly dignified, almost condescending courteousness, 'to disturb in this way your Sunday's reading. But I can but stay a few moments. I shall not interrupt you long.'

'We have been talking a good deal,' said Laurence, 'about the signs of the times.'

'And,' said Lady Ambrose eagerly, feeling herself near a friend, 'about all this wicked infidelity and irreligion that is so much about in the world now.'

'Ah, yes,' said Dr. Seydon slowly, and with a sudden frown, 'it is true, unhappily, that there is, or has been, much of that in our century. But what remains is confined, I imagine (and that is sad enough, God knows) to the half educated artisans in our large

towns, whom the Church in former years, alas! relaxed her hold on. For I fear I cannot deny that we, in this matter, are not wholly guiltless. The Church, we may depend upon it, has much to answer for.'

'Perfectly true, my dear sir! perfectly true,' exclaimed Mr. Luke, who could never resist assenting to this sentiment.

Dr. Seydon darted a quick glance at Mr. Luke, as if he were anything but pleased at finding himself so readily agreed with.

'But,' he went on, 'matters are fast assuming a more satisfactory appearance; and the great advance made in true education, and the liberal spirit that this brings with it, cannot fail to lead to that great change in our position that we so much desiderate.'

'Quite so,' said Mr. Luke. 'The true reading of ecclesiastical history——'

'Ah!' exclaimed Dr. Seydon, holding up his forefinger, 'exactly so. You have hit upon the right thing there.' ('Good gracious!' thought Mr. Luke, astounded at this patronising compliment, 'I should think I had.') 'Could we but get both the parties,' Dr. Seydon went on, addressing Mr. Luke across Lady Ambrose, 'to understand fairly the history of the important era, the matter would, I think, be as good as settled. You

see,' he said, turning to Lady Ambrose, 'if the Easterns will merely face steadily the pregnant fact that Michael Cerularius, in his first letter to Leo IX., in 1053, took absolutely no exception to any one point in Western doctrine, but simply to certain secondary points of discipline, they will see that the gulf that separates us is very slight when viewed by the clearer light of modern thought. I think,' he added, 'that I saw Lady Ambrose's name amongst the subscribers to the Eastern Church Union Association.'

'Oh yes,' said Lady Ambrose, 'certainly. I do so wish that some union could be brought about. For the Greek Church, you know, certainly have the Apostolical Succession; and then, if we were only joined with them, the Roman Catholics could never deny our orders—not,' she added, with a most cordial smile to Dr. Seydon, 'that I don't myself believe implicitly in them, as it is.'

A rapid frown gathered itself on Dr. Seydon's brow.

'The denial of them,' he said severely, 'hurts the Romanists far more than it does us. As to the Greeks, what I was going to say was this. Let them just cast their eyes back so far as the tenth century, and they

will see—and pray mark this, all of you,' he said, holding up his forefinger, and shaking it several times, 'for this is very important—I say the Greeks will see, unless they are determined to close their eyes, that at the time of the great rupture with the West, they did actually acknowledge the entire soundness of our confession of faith; the main point they objected to, and which they thought fit ground then for separation, being that the Western Church did not sing Alleluiah in Lent, and that it used in the Lord's Supper unleavened bread, which, Nicetas Pectoratus contended in an elaborate treatise, was dead bread, and could not therefore be either supersubstantial or consubstantial to us. It has been the fault of the Easterns, in fact, to be ever over-subtle, and to fall into those excesses of human wisdom which are foolishness with God. Isaac the Armenian, for instance, wrote a book to prove his countrymen in heresy for twenty-nine different reasons, of which the two most important are these—*that they did not blow on baptised persons, and that they made their consecrated oils of rapeseed and not of olives.* But two causes seem to me to be now working together, under God, to put the Easterns into a more becoming spirit, and to make them more

heartily willing to join us. These are—I have mentioned them in the third volume of my “History of the *Filioque* Clause”—first, that the genuine Greek blood is becoming daily more adulterated, and the Greek intellect losing therefore its old subtlety; and secondly, that the political disturbance that now seems imminent in the East, will distract them from abusing such subtlety as they still possess. We shall therefore meet on the broad ground of our fundamental agreements; and once let the moral influence of the two churches, the Greek and English, be mutually augmented by an open union, in another five years, I imagine, we shall have heard the last of infidelity, in England at least, or indeed of Romanism either.’

‘Now, that’s the sort of man,’ said Lady Ambrose, as soon as Dr. Seydon had departed, ‘that I should like to have for my clergyman in our new Republic.’

‘Seydon!’ exclaimed Mr. Luke, ‘so that is he, is it? I thought I remembered that face of his. Of course—I remember now, seeing that his college had given this living to him.’

‘It was he,’ said Laurence to Miss Merton, ‘who, some years ago, prevented Dr. Jenkinson being made a bishop, which

he said, though it might be a compliment to learning, would be a grievous insult to God.'

'And so, Lady Ambrose,' said Mr. Stockton, 'you would like Dr. Seydon for a clergyman! Well, in our ideal society you would be able to have any clergyman you chose—any religion you chose—any which most satisfied your own conscience.'

'Oh, very well,' said Lady Ambrose, 'if it would not interfere with one's religion in any way, I think all this culture and enlightenment most delightful.'

'It will bind us to nothing,' said Mr. Stockton, 'except to a recognition of nobleness, of morality, of poetry. What Mr. Laurence has offered to read to us is an account of how all of these are bound up in religion in *my* sense of the word.'

'Come, Mr. Laurence,' said Lady Ambrose, 'please go on. It is wonderful,' she added in a solemn whisper, 'how even bad men, like old Mr. Laurence, know at heart how it is really best to be good, and to believe in true religion.'

'*As I grow old, my dear Otho,*' Laurence again began to read, '*I am coming to think over many things that I have hitherto thought too little about, and, amongst others, the great*

mystery of Christianity. I am coming to see that, from a too superficial way of looking at it, I have done this religion a gross injustice, and have blindly failed to recognise how much of all that we hold most precious in life is dependent on its severe and unbending systems of theology and morals. It will perhaps strike you that it is rather late in the day for me to pay my tribute to these, now that the world at large is theoretically denying the former of them, and is practically forgetting the latter. But it is this very fact that induces me to speak out—the growing licence and the growing scepticism of modern society. I wish to raise my voice against the present state of things, and to warn the world that if it goes on much longer as it is going on now, it will soon have irremediably ruined all the finer and more piquant flavours of life, and that soon there will be actually nothing left to give rational zest to this poor pitiful existence of ours.

‘You know what an admirer I have always been, in many ways, of the ancients, and how, in many ways, I think modern civilisation barbarous as compared with theirs. I have not changed this opinion. I have only some lately to understand what it means. The charm of ancient life lies mainly in its

form. In essence, the life open to us is, as I fully see now, infinitely superior. And to what is this superiority due? Simply to Christianity. It came with Christianity, and it will also go with it.

‘I am not mad, Otho. Listen to me a little longer, my boy, and you will see my meaning.

‘To begin, then—just consider the one matter of humour. Compare the ancient humourists with the modern. Think for a moment of Lucian, of Aristophanes, of Plautus, of Petronius, of Horace; then think of Erasmus, Swift, Cervantes, Voltaire, Sterne. Does not the mere memory of the two sets of names bring home to you what a gulf in this matter there is between the ancient world and the modern? Is not the modern humour an altogether different thing from the ancient—broader and deeper beyond comparison or measurement? The humour of the ancients could raise a laugh; true—that is just what it could raise, and a laugh could express all the feelings raised by it. Think of the intolerable vulgarity of Homer’s gods, who “laughed consumedly” at Vulcan, as he waited on them,—why? because he was lame. The sense of humour on Olympus was about equal to what it would be now in a country lawyer’s

parlour. Think of Horace, who saw in a dull pun on two proper names, a joke so excellent that he wrote a whole satire in honour of it. It is true that Juvenal showed a somewhat finer sense, when he said that when Fortune was pleased to be facetious, she made a nouveau riche; Petronius, perhaps, was even in advance of Juvenal. But ancient humour at its best was a shallow thing. It meant little. It was like the bright sparkle on a brawling stream, hardly ankle-deep. But our modern humour is like the silent snake-like lights in a still water, that go coiling down into depths unfathomable, as it lures our thoughts onwards to the contemplation of endless issues. The twinkle in the eyes of a Sterne or a Cervantes seems to hint to us of Eleusinian mysteries with a triumphant solemn treachery; and wakes our souls, as we catch it, into a sudden thrill of delicious, furtive insight. Such humour as this may excite laughter; but no laughter can ease our feelings fully—they also demand tears; and even tears are not enough for us. Of such humour as this the ancients had hardly a notion; it differs from theirs as the man differs from the baby, and seems almost like a new sense, peculiar to the modern world.

‘Now, to what is this development of

humour due—this new and exquisite source of pleasure? Simply, as you must see, if you look into the matter, to that much maligned thing, Christianity, and that marvellous system of moral laws and restraints which, although accredited through imposture, elaborated by barbarism, and received by credulity, has entirely changed the whole complexion of life. Think how it has done this. It has slowly permeated and penetrated all man's inner existence. It has given him new un-earthly aims; it has given him new un-earthly standards by which to measure every action. It has cunningly associated everything with the most awful or the most glittering conceptions with which the imagination can scare or intoxicate itself—with Hell, Heaven, Judgment, and so forth: and thus there is scarcely a single choice or refusal that has been left indifferent, and not more or less nearly connected with the most stupendous issues. The infinitely beautiful, the infinitely terrible, the infinitely hateful meet us everywhere. Everything is enchanted, and seems to be what it is not. The enchantment quite deludes the vulgar; it a little deludes the wise; but the wise are for ever in various ways secretly undoing the spell, and getting glimpses of things as they really are. What

a delight these glimpses are to those that get them! Here lies the sense of humour—in the detection of truth through revered and reigning falsehood. Think of the colloquies of Erasmus, and his Laus Stultitiæ—there is an instance for you. Think of Don Quixote—there is another. All its humour is due to Christian dreams of honour, duty and chivalry. Who, again, would have cared for Swift's showing us that man was hateful, if Christ had not bewitched us into thinking that man was loveable? Gulliver owes its point to the Gospels. Sterne sees everything "big with infinite jest." But why? Because Christianity has made everything big also with infinite solemnity. A possible moral meaning is secreted over the whole surface of life, like the scented oil in the cells on the surface of an orange skin. The humourist catches the perfume of these volatile oils, as they are crushed out and wasted by our every action.

' Think, too, by the way, of the kindred subject of wit. I was reading a play of Congreve's yesterday: and this made me reflect how nearly all the brightest wit of the modern world consists in showing us this one thing—that fidelity in marriage is ridiculous; that is, in showing us what, but for Christianity, no one would ever have doubted. Such wit

is, as it were, the forbidden kiss we give to common sense, from which an angry religion has been bent on separating us.

'Think, too, of that flower of Christian civilisation, the innuendo. That is simply the adroit saying under difficulties of what, but for Christianity, everyone would have taken for granted.

'Here, then, you see, are the wit, the innuendo, the humour of the world, all owing their existence, or, at any rate, their flavour, to Christianity. And what would life, what would conversation be without these? But it is not these only that we owe to the same source. All our finer pleasures are indebted for their chief taste to it likewise. Love in itself, for instance, is, as everyone knows who has felt it, the coarsest and most foolish of all our feelings. Leave it free to do what it pleases, and we soon cease to care what it does. But Christianity, with a miraculous ingenuity, has confined and cramped it into so grotesque and painful a posture, and set such vigilant guardians to keep it there, that any return to its natural freedom is a rapture, an adventure, and a triumph, which none but the wisest and most skilful can compass with grace or safety, and which wise men, therefore, think worth compassing. It is indeed the

same with all the natural and true pleasures of life—poor tasteless things not worth living for, in themselves; but they have been so hidden away from us, and have come to be in such bad odour with the world, that only the wisest—for wisdom is but the detection of falsehood—see that they may be taken, and have the courage to take them; and the wisdom they are conscious of in doing this, forms a delicious sauce piquante—(of which humour, wit, and so on, are some of the flavours)—to these same poor pleasures, that can give us a real zest for them.

‘Such a life of wisdom is, of course, only for the few. The wise must always be few, as the rich must. The poor must make fine food for the rich to eat. The fools must make fine follies for the wise to detect. We cannot all be happy in a rational way. It is at least best that some of us should be. But what I want to point out to you, my boy, is, that if society goes on as it is going on now, nobody will be able soon to be rationally happy at all. It is true that I do not now live much in the world; but I have sufficient means of seeing the course it is taking. I, like Hamlet, have heard of its “paintings,” how it “jigs and ambles and lisps, and nick-names God’s creatures.” I know how fast all Christian

moral sentiment is silently dying out of it. Indeed, so rapid do I imagine to be the way in which it is losing all proper feeling, that I should not be surprised were society in another five years, if I am not dead by that time, to receive me back again. Now, as long as Christianity was firmly fixed as a faith, we might amuse ourselves by offending against its morals as much as we liked; for our acts were in no danger of losing their forbidden character. There would always be a persecution, under which pleasure might thrive. But now, since faith is dead, we have only the moral sentiments left to us; and if we once get rid of these by a too reckless violation of them, the whole work of Christianity, which I have been trying to explain to you, will be undone. Wit and humour, love and poetry, will all alike have left us. Life will have lost its seasonings and its sauces: and served up to us au naturel it will only nauseate us. Man, indeed, will then be only separated from the animals by his capacity for ennui.

‘I had once hoped that the middle classes—that vast and useless body, who have neither the skill that produces their wealth, nor the taste that can enjoy it—might have proved themselves at least of some use, by preserving

the traditions of a sound, respectable morality; that they might have kept alive the nation's power of being shocked and scandalised at wit, or grace, or freedom. But no; they too are changed. With awkward halting gait they are waddling in the footsteps of their betters, and they will soon have made vice as vulgar as they long ago made virtue.

'To me, of course, all this matters little. Such flavours as life has, have lasted me thus far; nor will the world's growing blankness affect me. I shall never look into a woman's eyes again. One of my own is blind now, and the other is so dim that I doubt if the best-paid beauty could contrive to look into it with more than an ironical tenderness. All this matters nothing to me. But you, my boy — what will be left for you, when I am taken away from the evil that is to come? Your prospect does not seem to me a cheerful one. But alas! I can offer no remedy. I can only beguile my time by warning you. At any rate, it is always good to think a little about the roots of things: so I trust you will be in some way profited by these patruæ verbera linguæ.'

When Laurence closed the book there was a silence of some moments, as if no one knew exactly how to take what had just been

read. But at last Donald Gordon exclaimed, in his devoutest of soft whispers : ' Is Saul also among the prophets ? ' The words acted like a spell ; the ice was broken, and Mr. Herbert, who hitherto had hardly uttered a syllable the whole afternoon, now broke out suddenly in his most emphatic accents.

' Thank you, my dear Laurence,' he exclaimed ; ' thank you much, indeed. There is something in what you have just read us that seems to me quite precious and peculiar. Nor do I find any such honesty in any creed sung by priests in churches, as I do in this sardonic confession of that great truth, which the present age as a whole is resolutely bent upon forgetting—that the grand knowledge for a man to know is the essential and eternal difference between right and wrong, between base and noble ; that there *is* a right and a noble to be striven for, not for the sake of its consequences, but in spite of them ; and that it is this fact alone which, under countless forms, is the one thing affirmed in all human art and implied in all serviceable learning. Your Cervantes smiles it to you ; your Swift curses it to you ; your Bernard of Morlaix hymns it to you ; your saddened Shakespeare tells it to you in every way. Strange indeed is it, and mournful, that we see a time when

the one truth that we live and die by not only needs to be pointed out to us, but asserted passionately in the teeth of those whom we have elected as our wisest teachers.' Mr. Saunders at once took this to be a special allusion to himself, and his face involuntarily began to array itself in a smile of triumph. 'However,' Mr. Herbert went on benignantly, 'you have truly gone the right way to work in constructing an ideal society, if you make it recognise this before all things, and see how witness is borne to it by every pleasure and every interest of life.'

'Ah, yes,' exclaimed Mr. Stockton, 'it is just this noble discrimination between right and wrong, Mr. Herbert, that modern enlightenment will so preëminently encourage and foster. Morality is quite indispensable to any dream of the future. And as to religion—the motto of the future is freedom—holy, awful, individual freedom. We shall each be free to choose or evolve the religion most profoundly suited to us.'

'Well,' said Lady Ambrose, 'as long as I may keep my own religion, I shall be quite satisfied; and about other people, I really don't think I'm bigoted—not as long, you know, as they belong to *some* church. But *religion* is the thing I want. Of course we

must have morality. Mustn't we?' she added, with a half-puzzled expression, turning to Lady Grace.

'Must!' sighed Mrs. Sinclair. 'It's very easy to say *must*.'

'Of course we must,' said Lady Grace cheerfully. 'My dear,' she went on, with a little kindly laugh towards Mr. Saunders, '*he* doesn't really doubt it.'

Mr. Saunders sprang to his feet as if an adder had stung him.

'What!' he exclaimed, standing in the centre of the group, and looking round him, 'and do I not really doubt that the degrading practice of prayer, the fetish-worship of celibacy, of mortification, and so forth—do I not doubt that the foul faith in a future life, the grotesque conceptions of the theological virtues, and that preposterous idol of the market-place, the sanctity of marriage,—do you think I do not really doubt that we must retain these? Do you think, on the contrary, I do not know that they are already doomed? However,' here Mr. Saunders paused suddenly and again sat down on the grass, 'there is no need for me at this moment to destroy any cherished illusions; though I shall be happy to show my analysis of them that I spoke about just now to anyone who is not

afraid to inspect it. I hear much said about tolerance, as a characteristic of your society. All I ask is, that you have the courage to extend your tolerance to me. Your new Republic may be full of illusions then. The great labour of destroying them will be positively *delicious* to me.'

'Well,' said Mr. Stockton, with a mixture of deference and patronage, 'and what does Miss Merton think?'

'Oh,' said Miss Merton with a slow smile, 'I am all in favour of toleration. I think that what I consider truth is quite good enough to stand on its own merits, if unprejudiced eyes can only be got to see them. And I honestly do think, that with really high-breeding, and with what we apparently mean by culture, we should have at least one part of the world as good as we could wish it. But yet—' she added, hesitating a little, 'we have surely settled only half the question yet. We have said a good deal about this wide and discerning taste that is to guide us. We have not said much yet about the particular things—the occupations, the duties, the pleasures, that it will lead us to choose.

'No,' began Mr. Rose, 'I should like myself very much to say something as to that—as to the new pleasures that modern culture has made possible for us.'

‘Suppose—’ said Lady Ambrose with one of her most beaming smiles, as she pushed her hat away over the back of her head, ‘suppose we talk of this by-and-by—at dinner, or in the evening. Let us just *enjoy* a little now. The air now is so truly delicious. It seems quite like a sin, doesn’t it, to think of going in to dinner by-and-by.’

A happy thought struck Lady Grace.

‘Suppose we have dinner out of doors, Otho,’ she said, ‘in the pavilion with the roses round it that you used to call the summer dining-room.’

This proposal was received with what was little short of rapture. ‘That really would be too delightful!’ exclaimed Lady Ambrose. ‘And what place could sound more perfect for us to finish our new Republic in!’ It was arranged accordingly.

‘And now,’ exclaimed Lady Ambrose to Laurence confidentially, as the conversation ceased to be general, ‘I want you to let me have a look at that book of your uncle’s. I have often heard it spoken about. Lord Heartpool had a copy, which he showed my poor father in Paris. Come, Mr. Laurence, you need not hold it back. I’m sure there’s nothing in it that would do me any harm.’

‘Well—no,’ said Laurence; ‘in this volume I don’t think there is.’

‘Because what you read just now,’ said Lady Ambrose, ‘was all really in favour of goodness, though it is true I didn’t quite like the tone of some of it.’

‘What,’ interposed Mr. Rose, ‘is there another volume? I should much like to see that.’

‘I declare, Mr. Laurence,’ said Lady Ambrose, who had now got the book in her hand, ‘here’s something really quite pretty—at least, I’ve only got as far as the first verse yet. It’s a little poem called “*To the Wife of an old Schoolfellow.*”’

‘Read it out to us—do,’ said Laurence, with a soft smile. ‘It will illustrate very well the letter we had just now.’

‘Do you know, I really think I *might* manage this,’ she said, ‘although I’m not in the least by way of being a reader out. Listen, then, and please don’t laugh at me.’

*Let others seek for wisdom's way
In modern science, modern wit,—
I turn to love, for all that these,
These two can teach, is taught by it.*

*Yes, all. In that first hour we met
And smiled and spoke so soft and long, love,
Did wisdom dawn; and I began
To disbelieve in right and wrong, love.*

*Then, as love's gospel clearer grew,
And I each day your doorstep trod, love,
I learned that love was all in all,
And rose to disbelieve in God, love.*

*Yes, wisdom's book ! you taught me this,
And ere I half had read you through, love,
I learned a deeper wisdom yet—
I learned to disbelieve in you, love.*

*So now, fair teacher, I am wise,
And free : 'tis truth that makes us free, love.
But you—you're pale ! grow wise as I,
And learn to disbelieve in me, love.*

As Lady Ambrose had read on, her voice had grown more and more disapproving, and several times she had shown symptoms of being on the point of stopping.

'I've no doubt it's all very witty,' she said, putting down the book, which was eagerly caught up by Mr. Rose, 'but—but that sort of thing, you know,' she exclaimed at last, 'I think is rather better in the smoking-room. However, I saw something next to those verses, that I think would suit Miss Merton. It seemed to be a sort of address to the Virgin Mary.'

Miss Merton looked a little embarrassed ; Laurence looked astonished.

'Let me read it,' exclaimed Mr. Rose, rapidly turning over the pages. 'This must be what Lady Ambrose means, I think :—

*My own, my one desire,
Virgin most fair.'*

'Yes,' said Lady Ambrose, 'that's it.'

‘Oh,’ said Laurence, ‘that is not my uncle’s ; it is mine. It is the earliest copy of verses I ever wrote. I was seventeen then, and by an odd freak my uncle printed them in the end of his own collection.’

Miss Merton’s embarrassment in a great measure disappeared. She looked interested; and Mr. Rose, in slow, suave tones went on to read :—

*Mine own, my one desire,
 Virgin most fair
 Of all the virgin choir !
 Hail, O most pure, most perfect, loveliest one !
 Lo, in my hand I bear,
 Woven for the circling of thy long gold hair,
 Culled leaves and flowers, from places which the sun
 The spring long shines upon,
 Where never shepherd hath driven flock to graze,
 Nor any grass is mown ;
 But there sound through all the sunny sweet warm days,
 Mid the green holy place,
 The wild bee’s wings alone.
 Yea, and with jealous care
 The maiden Reverence tends the fair things there,
 And watereth all of them withling sprink showers
 Of pearled grey dew from a clear running river.
 Whoso is chaste of spirit utterly,
 May gather there the leaves and fruits and flowers—
 The unchaste, never.
 But thou, O goddess, and dearest love of mine—*

(‘ I don’t at all approve of this,’ murmured Lady Ambrose.)

*Take, and about thine hair
 This anadem entwine—
 Take, and for my sake wear,
 Who am more to thee than other mortals are,
 Whose is the holy lot
 As friend with friend to walk and talk with thee,
 Hearing thy sweet mouth's music in mine ear,
 But thee beholding not.*¹

‘Ah, they are sweet verses,’ said Mr. Rose; ‘a little too ascetic, perhaps, to be quite Greek. They are from Euripides, I see—the address to Artemis of Hippolytus.’

‘Yes,’ said Laurence; ‘I don’t think I ever wrote any original poetry.’

‘It’s exactly like Mr. Laurence—that bit,’ whispered Mrs. Sinclair.

‘And now,’ said Mr. Rose, ‘as I suppose we shall ere long be all going to dress for dinner, I will go, Mr. Laurence, if you will let me, and examine that other volume you spoke of, of your uncle’s Miscellanies.’

Mr. Rose moved slowly away; and as he did so, there came the sound of the distant dressing-bell, which warned the whole party that it was time to be following his example.

¹ Eur. Hipp. v. 69—85.

BOOK IV.

CHAPTER I.

NO proposal could have been happier than Lady Grace's, of the garden banquet in the pavilion. It seemed to the guests, when they were all assembled there, that the lovely summer's day was going to close with a scene from fairy-land. The table itself, with its flowers, and glowing fruit, and its many-coloured Venetian glass, shone and gleamed and sparkled, in the evening light, that was turning outside to a cool mellow amber ; and above, from the roof, in which the dusk was already darkness, hung china lamps, in the shape of green and purple grape-clusters, looking like luminous fruits stolen from Aladdin's garden. The pavilion, open on all sides, was supported on marble pillars, that were almost hidden in red and white roses. Behind, the eye rested on great tree-trunks, and glades of rich foliage ; and before, it would pass over turf

and flowers, till it reached the sea beyond, on which, in another hour, the faint silver of the moonlight would begin to tremble.

There was something in the whole scene that was at once calming and exhilarating; and nearly all present seemed to feel in some measure this double effect of it. Dr. Jenkinson had been quite restored by an afternoon's nap; and his face was now all a-twinkle with a fresh benignity, that had however, like an early spring morning, just a faint suspicion of frost in it. Mr. Storcks even was less severe than usual; and as he raised his champagne to his lips, he would at times look very nearly conversational.

'My dear Laurence,' exclaimed Mr. Herbert, 'it really almost seems as if your visions of the afternoon had come true, and that we actually were in your new Republic already. I can only say that, if it is at all like this, it will be an entirely charming place—too charming, perhaps. But now, remember this—you have but half got through the business to which you first addressed yourselves—that of forming a picture of a perfect aristocracy—an aristocracy in the true and genuine sense of the word. You are all to have culture, or taste. Very good, you have talked a great deal about that, and you

have seen what you mean by it; and you have recognised, above all, that it includes a discrimination between right and wrong. But now, you with all this taste and culture—you gifted men and women of the nineteenth century,—what sort of things does your taste teach you to reach out towards? In what actions and aims, in what affections and emotions, would you place your happiness? That is what I want to hear—the practical manifestations of this culture.’

‘Ah,’ said Mr. Rose, ‘I have at this moment a series of essays in the press, which would go far towards answering these questions of yours. They do, indeed, deal with just this—the effect of the choicer culture of this century on the soul of man—the ways in which it endows him with new perceptions—how it has made him, in fact, a being altogether more highly organised. All I regret is, that these choicer souls, these *χαρίεντες*, are as yet like flowers that have not found a climate in which they can thrive properly. That mental climate will doubtless come with time. What we have been trying to do this afternoon is, I imagine, nothing more than to anticipate it in imagination.’

‘Well,’ said Mr. Herbert, with a little the tone of an inquisitor, ‘that is just what I

have been asking. What will this climate be like, and what will these flowers be like in this climate? How would your culture alter and better the present, if its powers were equal to its wishes?’

Mr. Rose's soft lulling tone harmonised well with the scene and hour, and the whole party seemed willing to listen to him; or at any rate no one felt any prompting to interrupt him.

‘I can show you an example, Mr. Herbert,’ he said, ‘of culture demanding a finer climate, in—if you will excuse my seeming egoism—in myself. For instance, (to take the widest matter I can fix upon—the general outward surroundings of our lives), often, when I walk about London, and see how hideous its whole external aspect is, and what a dissonant population throng it, a chill feeling of despair comes over me. Consider how the human eye delights in form and colour, and the ear in tempered and harmonious sounds; and then think for a moment of a London street! Think of the shapeless houses, the forest of ghastly chimney-pots, of the hell of distracting noises made by the carts, the cabs, the carriages—think of the bustling, commonplace, careworn

crowds that jostle you—think of an omnibus—think of a four-wheeler——’

‘I often ride in an omnibus,’ said Lord Allen, with a slight smile to Miss Merton.

‘It is true,’ replied Mr. Rose, only over-hearing the tone in which these words were said, ‘that one may ever and again catch some touch of sunlight that will for a moment make the meanest object beautiful with its furtive alchemy. But that is Nature’s work, not man’s; and we must never confound the accidental beauty that Nature will bestow on man’s work, even at its worst, with the rational and designed beauty of man’s work at its best. It is this rational human beauty that I say our modern city life is so completely wanting in; nay, the look of out-of-door London seems literally to stifle the very power of imagining such beauty possible. Indeed, as I wander along our streets, pushing my way among the throngs of faces—faces puckered with misdirected thought, or expressionless with none—barbarous faces set towards Parliament, or Church, or scientific lecture-rooms, or Government offices, or counting-houses—I say, as I push my way amongst all the sights and sounds of the streets of our great city, only one thing ever

catches my eye, that breaks in upon my mood, and warns me I need not despair.'

'And what is that?' asked Allen, with some curiosity.

'The shops,' Mr. Rose answered, 'of certain of our upholsterers and dealers in works of art. Their windows, as I look into them, act like a sudden charm on me—like a splash of cold water dashed on my forehead when I am fainting. For I seem there to have got a glimpse of the real heart of things; and as my eyes rest on the perfect pattern (many of which are really quite delicious; indeed, when I go to ugly houses, I often take a scrap of some artistic *crétone* with me in my pocket as a kind of æsthetic smelling salts), I say, when I look in at their windows, and my eyes rest on the perfect pattern of some new fabric for a chair or for a window-curtain, or on some new design for a wall-paper, or on some old china vase, I become at once sharply conscious, Mr. Herbert, that, despite the ungenial mental climate of the present age, strange yearnings for, and knowledge of, true beauty, are beginning to show themselves like flowers above the weedy soil; and I remember, amidst the roar and clatter of our streets, and the mad noises of our own times, that there is amongst us a growing

number who have deliberately turned their backs on all these things, and have thrown their whole souls and sympathies into the happier art-ages of the past. They have gone back,' said Mr. Rose, raising his voice a little, 'to Athens and to Italy, to the Italy of Leo and to the Athens of Pericles. To such men the clamour, the interests, the struggles of our own times, become as meaningless as they really are. To them the boyhood of Bathyllus is of more moment than the manhood of Napoleon. Borgia is a more familiar name than Bismarck. I know, indeed—and I really do not blame them—several distinguished artists who, resolving to make their whole lives consistently perfect, will, on principle, never admit a newspaper into their houses that is of later date than the times of Addison; and I have good trust that the number of such men is on the increase—men I mean,' said Mr. Rose, toying tenderly with an exquisite wine-glass of Salviati's, 'who with a steady and set purpose follow art for the sake of art, beauty for the sake of beauty, love for the sake of love, life for the sake of life.'

Mr. Rose's slow gentle voice, which was apt at certain times to become peculiarly irritating, sounded now like the evening air

grown articulate, and had secured him hitherto a tranquil hearing, as if by a kind of spell. This however seemed here in sudden danger of snapping.

‘What, Mr. Rose!’ exclaimed Lady Ambrose, ‘do you mean to say, then, that the number of people is on the increase who won’t read the newspapers?’

‘Why, the men must be absolute idiots!’ said Lady Grace, shaking her grey curls, and putting on her spectacles to look at Mr. Rose.

Mr. Rose however was imperturbable.

‘Of course,’ he said, ‘you may have newspapers if you will: I myself always have them; though in general they are too full of public events to be of much interest. I was merely speaking just now of the spirit of the movement. And of that we must all of us here have some knowledge. We must all of us have friends whose houses more or less embody it. And even if we had not, we could not help seeing signs of it—signs of how true and earnest it is, in the enormous sums that are now given for really good objects.’

‘That,’ said Lady Grace, with some tartness, ‘is true enough, thank God!’

‘But I can’t see,’ said Lady Ambrose,

whose name often figured in the *Times*, in the subscription-lists of advertised charities—‘I can’t see, Mr. Rose, any reason in that why we should not read the newspapers.’

‘The other day, for instance,’ said Mr. Rose reflectively, ‘I heard of eight Chelsea shepherdesses, picked up by a dealer, I really forget where—in some common cottage, if I recollect aright, covered with dirt, giving no pleasure to anyone—and these were all sold in a single day, and not one of them fetched less than two hundred and twenty pounds.’

‘I can’t help thinking they must have come from Cremorne,’ said Mrs. Sinclair softly.

‘But why,’ said Mr. Rose, ‘should I speak of particular instances? We *must* all of us have friends whose houses are full of priceless treasures such as these—the whole atmosphere of whose rooms really seems impregnated with art—seems in fact, Mr. Herbert, such an atmosphere as we should dream of for our new Republic.’

‘To be sure,’ exclaimed Lady Ambrose, feeling that she had at last got upon solid ground. ‘By the way, Mr. Rose,’ she said, with her most gracious of smiles, ‘I suppose you have hardly seen Lady Julia Hayman’s new house in Belgrave Square? I’m sure

that would delight you. I should like to take you there some day, and show it to you.'

'I have seen it,' said Mr. Rose, with languid condescension. 'It was very pretty, I thought—some of it really quite nice.'

This and the slight rudeness of manner it was said with, raised Mr. Rose greatly in Lady Ambrose's estimation, and she began to think with respect of his late utterances.

'Well, Mr. Herbert,' Mr. Rose went on, 'what I want to say is this. We have here in the present age, as it is, fragments of the right thing. We have a number of isolated right interiors; we have a few, very few right exteriors. But in our ideal state, our entire city—our London—the metropolis of our society, would be as a whole as perfect as these fragments. Taste would not there be merely an indoor thing. It would be written visibly for all to look upon, in our streets, our squares, our gardens. Could we only mould England to our wishes, the thing to do, I am persuaded, would be to remove London to some kindlier site, that it might there be altogether born anew. I myself would have it taken to the south-west, and to the sea-coast, where the waves are blue, and where the air is calm and fine, and there—'

'Ah me!' sighed Mr. Luke with a lofty sadness, '*cœlum non animam mutant.*'

‘Pardon me,’ said Mr. Rose, ‘few paradoxes—and most paradoxes are false—are, I think, so false as that. This much at least of sea-like man’s mind has, that scarcely anything so distinctly gives a tone to it as the colour of the skies he lives under. And I was going to say,’ he went on, looking out dreamily towards the evening waves, ‘that as the imagination is a quick workman, I can at this moment see our metropolis already transplanted and rebuilt. I seem to see it now as it were from a distance, with its palaces, its museums, its churches, its convents, its gardens, its picture-galleries—a cluster of domed and pillared marble, sparkling on a gray headland. It is Rome, it is Athens, it is Florence, arisen and come to life again, in these modern days. The aloe-tree of beauty again blossoms there, under the azure stainless sky.’

‘Do you know, Mr. Rose,’ said Lady Ambrose in her most cordial manner, ‘all this is *very* beautiful; and certainly no one can think London as it is more ugly than I do. That’s natural in me, isn’t it, being a denizen of poor prosaic South Audley Street as I am? But don’t you think that your notion is—it’s very beautiful, I quite feel that—but don’t you think it is perhaps a little too

dream-like—too unreal, if you know what I mean ?’

‘Such a city,’ said Mr. Rose earnestly, ‘is indeed a dream, but it is a dream which we might make a reality, would circumstances only permit of it. We have many amongst us who know what is beautiful, and who passionately desire it ; and would others only be led by these, it is quite conceivable that we might some day have a capital, the entire aspect of which should be the visible embodiment of our finest and most varied culture, our most sensitive taste, and our deepest æsthetic measure of things. This is what this capital of our new Republic must be, this dwelling-place of our ideal society. We shall have houses, galleries, streets, theatres, such as Giulio Romano or Giorgio Vasari, or Giulio Campi would have rejoiced to look at ; we shall have metal-work worthy of the hand of Ghiberti and the praise of Michel Angelo ; we shall rival Domenico Beccafumi with our pavements. As you wander through our thoroughfares and our gardens, your feelings will not be jarred by the presence of human vulgarity, or the desolating noise of traffic ; nor in every spare space will your eyes be caught by abominable advertisements of excursion trains to Brighton, or of Horniman’s

cheap tea. They will rest instead, here on an exquisite fountain, here on a statue, here on a bust of Zeus or Hermes or Aphrodite, glimmering in a laurelled nook; or on a *Mater Dolorosa* looking down on you from her holy shrine; or on the carved marble gate-posts of our palace gardens, or on their wrought iron or wrought bronze gates; or perhaps on such triumphal arches as that which Antonio San Gallo constructed in honour of Charles V., and of which you must all remember the description given by Vasari. Such a city,' said Mr. Rose, 'would be the externalisation of the human spirit in the highest state of development that we can conceive for it. We should there see expressed openly all our appreciations of all the beauty that we can detect in the world's whole history. The wind of the spirit that breathed there would blow to us from all the places of the past, and be charged with infinite odours. Every frieze on our walls, every clustered capital of a marble column, would be a garland or nosegay of associations. Indeed, our whole city, as compared with the London that is now, would be itself a nosegay as compared with a faggot; and as related to the life that I would see lived in it, it would be like a shell-murmuring with all the world's

memories, and held to the ear of the two twins, Life and Love.'

Mr. Rose had got so dreamy by this time that he felt himself the necessity of turning a little more matter-of-fact again.

'You will see what I mean, plainly enough,' he said, 'if you will just think of our architecture, and consider how that naturally will be——'

'Yes,' said Mr. Luke, 'I should be glad to hear about our architecture.'

'—How that naturally will be,' Mr. Rose went on, 'of no style in particular.'

'The deuce it won't!' exclaimed Mr. Luke.

'No,' continued Mr. Rose, unmoved; 'no style in particular, but a *renaissance* of all styles. It will matter nothing to us whether they be pagan or Catholic, classical or mediæval. We shall be quite without prejudice or bigotry. To the eye of true taste, an Aquinas in his cell before a crucifix, or a Narcissus gazing at himself in a still fountain, are—in their own ways, you know—equally beautiful.'

'Well, really,' said Miss Merton, 'I can *not* fancy St. Thomas being a very taking object to people who don't believe in him either as a saint or a philosopher. I always

think that, except from a Christian point of view, a saint can be hardly better described than by Newman's lines, as—

A bundle of bones, whose breath
Infects the world before his death.'¹

'I remember the lines well,' said Mr. Rose calmly, 'and the writer you mention puts them in the mouth of a yelping devil. But devils, as far as I know, are not generally—except, perhaps, Milton's—conspicuous for taste: indeed, if we may trust Goethe, the very touch of a flower is torture to them.'

'Dante's biggest devil,' cried Mr. Saunders, to everyone's amazement, 'chewed Judas Iscariot like a quid of tobacco, to all eternity. He, at any rate, knew what he liked.'

Mr. Rose started, and visited Mr. Saunders with a rapid frown. He then proceeded, turning again to Miss Merton as if nothing had happened.

'Let me rather,' he said, 'read a nice sonnet to you, which I had sent to me this morning, and which was in my mind just now. These lines'—Mr. Rose here produced a paper from his pocket—'were written by a boy of eighteen—a youth of extraordinary

¹ Vide J. H. Newman's *Dream of Gerontius*.

promise, I think, whose education I may myself claim to have had some share in directing. Listen,' he said, laying the verses before him, on a clean plate.

*Three visions in the watches of one night
Made sweet my sleep—almost too sweet to tell.
One was Narcissus by a woodside well,
And on the moss his limbs and feet were white;
And one, Queen Venus, blown for my delight
Across the blue sea in a rosy shell;
And one, a lean Aquinas in his cell,
Kneeling, his pen in hand, with aching sight
Strained towards a carven Christ; and of these three
I knew not which was fairest. First I turned
Towards that soft boy, who laughed and fled from me;
Towards Venus then; and she smiled once, and she
Fled also. Then with teeming heart I yearned,
O Angel of the Schools, towards Christ with thee!*

Yes,' murmured Mr. Rose to himself, folding up the paper; 'they are dear lines. Now, there,' he said, 'we have a true and tender expression of the really Catholic spirit of modern æstheticism, which holds nothing common or unclean. It is in this spirit, I say, that the architects of our state will set to work. And thus for our houses, for our picture-galleries, for our churches—I trust we shall have many churches—they will select and combine——'

'Do you seriously mean,' broke in Allen, a little impatiently, 'that it is a thing to wish

for and to look forward to, that we should abandon all attempts at original architecture, and content ourselves with simply sponging on the past ?’

‘I do,’ replied Mr. Rose suavely ; ‘and for this reason, if for no other, that the world can now successfully do nothing else. Nor, indeed, is it to be expected or even wished that it should.’

‘You say we have no good architecture now!’ exclaimed Lady Ambrose ; ‘but, Mr. Rose, have you forgotten our modern churches ? Don’t you think them beautiful ? Perhaps you never go to All Saints’ ?’

‘I every now and then,’ said Mr. Rose, ‘when I am in the weary mood for it, attend the services of our English Ritualists, and I admire their churches very much indeed. In some places the whole thing is really managed with surprising skill. The dim religious twilight, fragrant with the smoke of incense ; the tangled roofs that the music seems to cling to ; the tapers, the high altar, and the strange intonation of the priests, all produce a curious old-world effect, and seem to unite one with things that have been long dead. Indeed, it all seems to me far more a part of the past than the services of the Catholics.’

Lady Ambrose did not express her appro-

bation of the last part of this sentiment, out of regard for Miss Merton; but she gave a smile and a nod of pleased intelligence to Mr. Rose.

‘Yes,’ Mr. Rose went on, ‘there is a regretful insincerity about it all, that is very nice, and that at once appeals to me, “*Gleich einer alten halbverklungenen Sage.*” The priests are only half in earnest; the congregations, even——’

‘Then I am quite sure,’ interrupted Lady Ambrose with vigour, ‘that you can never have heard Mr. Cope preach.’

‘I don’t know,’ said Mr. Rose languidly. ‘I never enquired, nor have I ever heard anyone so much as mention, the names of any of them. Now all that, Lady Ambrose, were life really in the state it should be, you would be able to keep.’

‘Do you seriously, and in sober earnest, mean,’ Allen again broke in, ‘that you think it a good thing that all our art and architecture should be borrowed and insincere, and that our very religion should be nothing but a dilettante memory?’

‘The opinion,’ said Mr. Rose, ‘which by the way you slightly misrepresent, is not mine only, but that of all those of our own-day who are really devoting themselves to

art for its own sake. I will try to explain the reason of this. In the world's life, just as in the life of a man, there are certain periods of eager and all-absorbing action, and these are followed by periods of memory and reflection. We then look back upon our past, and become for the first time conscious of what we are, and of what we have done. We then see the dignity of toil, and the grand results of it, the beauty and the strength of faith, and the fervent power of patriotism; which, whilst we laboured, and believed, and loved, we were quite blind to. Upon such a reflective period has the world now entered. It has acted and believed already; its task now is to learn to value action and belief—to feel and to be thrilled at the beauty of them. And the chief means by which it can learn this is art—the art of a *renaissance*. For by the power of such art, all that was beautiful, strong, heroic, or tender in the past—all the actions, passions, faiths, aspirations of the world, that lie so many fathom deep in the years—float upwards to the tranquil surface of the present, and make our lives like what seems to me one of the loveliest things in nature, the iridescent film on the face of a stagnant water. Yes; the past is not dead unless we choose that it shall be so. Chris-

tianity itself is not dead. There is "nothing of it that doth fade," but turns "into something rich and strange," for us to give a new tone to our lives with. And, believe me,' Mr. Rose went on, gathering earnestness, 'that the happiness possible in such conscious periods is the only true happiness. Indeed, the active periods of the world were not really happy at all. We only fancy them to have been so by a pathetic fallacy. Is the hero happy during his heroism? No, but after it, when he sees what his heroism was, and reads the glory of it in the eyes of youth or maiden.'

'All this is very poor stuff—*very* poor stuff,' murmured Dr. Jenkinson, whose face had become gradually the very picture of crossness.

'Do you mean, Mr. Rose,' said Miss Merton, with a half humorous, half incredulous smile, 'that we never value religion till we have come to think it nonsense?'

'Not nonsense—no,' exclaimed Mr. Rose in gentle horror; 'I only mean that it never lights our lives so beautifully as when it is leaving them like the evening sun. It is in such periods of the world's life that art springs into being in its greatest splendour. Your Raphael, Miss Merton, who painted

you your "dear Madonnas," was a luminous cloud in the sunset sky of the Renaissance,—a cloud that took its fire from a faith that was sunk or sinking.'

'I'm afraid that the faith is not quite sunk yet,' said Miss Merton, with a slight sudden flush in her cheeks, and with just the faintest touch of suppressed anger.

Mr. Saunders, Mr. Stockton, Mr. Storks, and Mr. Luke all raised their eyebrows.

'No,' said Mr. Rose, 'such cyclic sunsets are happily apt to linger.'

'Mr. Rose,' exclaimed Lady Ambrose, with her most gracious of smiles, 'of course everyone who has ears must know that all this is very beautiful, but I am positively so stupid that I haven't been quite able to follow it all.'

'I will try to make my meaning clearer,' he said, in a brisker tone. 'I often figure to myself an unconscious period and a conscious one, as two women—one an untamed creature with embrowned limbs native to the air and the sea; the other marble-white and swan-soft, couched delicately on cushions before a mirror, and watching her own supple reflection gleaming in the depths of it. On the one is the sunshine and the sea-spray. The wind of Heaven and her unbound hair

are playmates. The light of the sky is in her eyes; on her lips is a free laughter. We look at her, and we know that she is happy. *We* know it, mark me; but *she* knows it not. Turn, however, to the other, and all is changed. Outwardly, there is no gladness there. Her dark, gleaming eyes open depth within depth upon us, like the circles of a new Inferno. There is a clear, shadowy pallor on her cheek. Only her lips are scarlet. There is a sadness—a languor, even in the grave tendrils of her heavy hair, and in each changing curve of her bosom as she breathes or sighs.'

'What a very odd man Mr. Rose is!' said Lady Ambrose in a loud whisper. 'He always seems to talk of everybody as if they had no clothes on. And does he mean by this that we ought to be always in the dumps?'

'Yes,' Mr. Rose was meanwhile proceeding, his voice again growing visionary, 'there is no eagerness, no action there; and yet all eagerness, all action is known to her as the writing on an open scroll; only, as she reads, even in the reading of it, action turns into emotion, and eagerness into a sighing memory. Yet such a woman really may stand symbolically for us as the patroness and the lady of

all gladness, who makes us glad in the only way now left us. And not only in the only way, but in the best way—the way of ways. Her secret is self-consciousness. She knows that she is fair; she knows, too, that she is sad; but she sees that sadness is lovely, and so sadness turns to joy. Such a woman may be taken as a symbol, not of our architecture only, but of all the æsthetic surroundings with which we shall shelter and express our life. Such a woman do I see whenever I enter a ritualistic church——’

‘I know,’ said Mrs. Sinclair, ‘that very peculiar people do go to such places; but, Mr. Rose,’ she said with a look of appealing enquiry, ‘I thought they were generally rather over-dressed than otherwise?’

‘The imagination,’ said Mr. Rose, opening his eyes in grave wonder at Mrs. Sinclair, ‘may give her what garb it chooses. Our whole city, then—the city of our new Republic—will be in keeping with this spirit. It will be the architectural and decorative embodiment of the most educated longings of our own times after order and loveliness and delight, whether of the senses or the imagination. It will be, as it were, a resurrection of the past, in response to the longing and the passionate regret of the present. It

will be such a resurrection as took place in Italy during its greatest epoch, only with this difference——'

'You seem to have forgotten trade and business altogether,' said Dr. Jenkinson. 'I think, however rich you intend to be, you will find that they are necessary.'

'Yes, Mr. Rose, you're not going to deprive us of all our shops, I hope?' said Lady Ambrose.

'Because, you know,' said Mrs. Sinclair, with a soft maliciousness, 'we can't go without dresses altogether, Mr. Rose. And if I were there,' she continued plaintively, 'I should want a bookseller to publish the scraps of verse—poetry, as I am pleased to call it—that I am always writing.'

'Pooh!' said Mr. Rose, a little annoyed, 'we shall have all that somewhere, of course; but it will be out of the way, in a sort of Piræus, where the necessary *καπήλοι*——'

'A sort of what?' said Lady Ambrose.

'Mr. Rose merely means,' said Donald Gordon, 'that there must be good folding-doors between the offices and the house of life; and that the servants are not to be seen walking about in the pleasure-grounds.'

'Yes,' said Mr. Rose, 'exactly so.'

'Well, then,' said Lady Ambrose, 'I

quite agree with you, Mr. Rose; and if wishing were only having, I've not the least doubt that we should all of us be going back to Mr. Rose's city to-morrow, instead of to London, with its carts, and cabs, and smoke, and all its thousand-and-one drawbacks. I'm sure,' she said, turning to Miss Merton, 'you would, my dear, with all your taste.'

'It certainly,' said Miss Merton, smiling, 'all sounds very beautiful. All I am afraid of is that we should not be quite worthy of it.'

'Nay,' said Mr. Rose, 'but the very point is that we shall be worthy of it, and that it will be worthy of us. I said, if you recollect, just now, that the world's ideal of the future must resemble in many ways its memory of the Italian Renaissance. But don't let that mislead you. It may resemble that, but it will be something far in advance of it. During the last three hundred years—in fact, during the last sixty or seventy years, the soul of man has developed strangely in its sentiments and its powers of feeling; in its powers, in fact, of enjoying life. As I said, I have a work in the press, devoted entirely to a description of this growth. I have some of the proof sheets with me; and if you will let me I should like to read you one or two passages.'

‘I don’t think much can be made out of that,’ said Dr. Jenkinson, with a vindictive sweetness. ‘Human sentiment dresses itself in different fashions, as human ladies do ; but I think beneath the surface it is much the same. I mean,’ he added, suddenly recollecting that he might thus seem to be rooting up the wheat of his own opinions along with the tares of Mr. Rose’s, ‘I mean that I don’t think in seventy years, or even in three hundred, you will be able to show that human nature has *very* much changed. I don’t think so.’

Unfortunately, however, the Doctor found that, instead of putting down Mr. Rose by this, he had only raised up Mr. Luke.

‘Ah, Jenkinson, I think you are wrong there,’ said Mr. Luke. ‘As long as we recognise that this growth is at present confined to a very small minority, the fact of such growth is *the* most important, *the* most significant of all facts. Indeed, our friend Mr. Rose is quite right thus far, in the stress he lays on our appreciation of the past, that we have certainly in these modern times acquired a new sense, by which alone the past can be appreciated truly, the sense which, if I may invent a phrase for it, I should call that of Historical Perspective ; so that now really

for the first time the landscape of history is beginning to have some intelligible charm for us. And this, you know, is not all. Our whole views of things—(you, Jenkinson, must know this as well as I do)—the *Zeitgeist* breathes upon them, and they do not die; but they are changed—they are enlightened.’

The Doctor was too much annoyed to make any audible answer to this; but he murmured with some emphasis to himself, ‘That’s *not* what Mr. Rose was saying; that’s *not* what I was contradicting.’

‘You take, Luke, a rather more rose-coloured view of things than you did last night,’ said Mr. Storks.

‘No,’ said Mr. Luke, with a sigh, ‘far from it. I am not denying (pray, Jenkinson, remember this) that the majority of us are at present either Barbarians or Philistines; and the ugliness of these is more glaring now than at any former time. But that any of us are able to see them thus distinctly in their true colours, itself shows that there must be a deal of light somewhere. Even to make darkness visible some light is needed. We should always recollect that. We are only discontented with ourselves when we are struggling to be better than ourselves.’

‘And in many ways,’ said Laurence, ‘I

think the struggle has been successful, Take, for instance, the pleasure we get now from the aspects of external nature, and the way in which these seem to mix themselves with our lives. This certainly is something distinctly modern. And nearly all our other feelings, it seems to me, have changed just like this one, and have become more sensitive, and more highly organised. If we may judge by its expression in literature, love has, certainly; and that I suppose is the most important and comprehensive feeling in life.'

'Does Mr. Laurence only *suppose* that?' sighed Mrs. Sinclair, casting down her eyes.

'Well,' said Dr. Jenkinson, 'our feelings about these two things—about love and external nature—perhaps have changed somewhat. Yes, I think they have. I think you might make an interesting magazine article out of that—but hardly more.'

'I rather,' said Laurence apologetically, 'agree with Mr. Luke and Mr. Rose, that all our feelings have developed just as these two have. And I think this is partly owing to the fusion in our minds of our sacred and secular ideas—which indeed you were speaking of this morning in your sermon. Thus, to find some rational purpose in life was once

merely enjoined as a supernatural duty. In our times it has taken our common nature upon it, and become a natural longing—though, I fear,' he added softly, 'a fruitless one.'

'Yes,' suddenly exclaimed Lady Grace, who had been listening intently to her nephew's words; 'and if you are speaking of modern progress, Otho, you should not leave out the diffusion of those grand ideas of justice, and right, and freedom, and humanity which are at work in the great heart of the nation. We are growing cultivated in Mr. Luke's noble sense of the word, and our whole hearts revolt against the way in which women have hitherto been treated, and against the cruelties which dogma asserts the good God can practise, and the cruelties on the poor animals which wicked men do practise. And war too,' Lady Grace went on, a glow mounting into her soft faded cheek, 'think how fast we are outgrowing that! England at any rate will never watch the outbreak of another war, with all its inevitable cruelties, without giving at least one sob that shall make all Europe pause and listen. Indeed, we must not forget how the entire substance of religion is ceasing to be a mass of dogmas, and is becoming embodied instead in practice and in action.'

‘Quite true, Lady Grace,’ said Mr. Luke. Lady Grace was just about to have given a sign for rising; but Mr. Luke’s assent detained her. ‘As to war,’ he went on, ‘there may, of course, be different opinions. Questions of policy may arise——’ (‘As if any policy,’ murmured Lady Grace, ‘could justify us in such a thing!’) ‘but religion—yes, that, as I have been trying to teach the world, is the great and important point on which culture is beginning to cast its light—and with just the effect which you describe. It is true that culture is at present but a little leaven hid in a barrel of meal; but still it is doing its work slowly; and in the matter of religion—indeed, in all matters, for religion rightly understood embraces all——’ (‘I *do* like to hear Mr. Luke talk sometimes,’ murmured Lady Grace), ‘its effect is just this—to show us that religion in any civilised, any reasonable, any sweet sense, can never be found except embodied in action; that it is, in fact, nothing but right action, pointed—winged, as it were—by right emotion, by a glow, an aspiration—an aspiration towards God——’ (Lady Grace sighed with feeling) —‘not of course,’ Mr. Luke went on confidentially, ‘that petulant Pedant of the

theologians—that irritable angry Father, with the very uncertain temper—but towards——’

‘An infinite, inscrutable, loving Being,’ began Lady Grace, with a slight moisture in her eyes.

‘Quite so,’ said Mr. Luke, not waiting to listen, ‘towards that great Law—that great verifiable tendency of things—that great stream whose flowing such of us as are able are now so anxiously trying to accelerate. There is no vain speculation about creation, and first causes, and consciousness here, which are matters we can never verify, and which matter nothing to us——’

‘But,’ stammered Lady Grace aghast, ‘Mr. Luke, do you mean to say that—but it surely must matter something whether God can hear our prayers, and will help us, and whether we owe Him any duty, and whether He is conscious of what we do, and will judge us—it must matter——’

Mr. Luke leaned forwards towards Lady Grace, and spoke to her in a confidential whisper.

‘Not two straws—not that,’ he said with a smile, and a very slight fillip of his finger and thumb.

Lady Grace was thunderstruck.

‘But,’ again she stammered softly and

eagerly, 'unless you say there is no personal——'

Mr. Luke hated the word *personal*; it was so much mixed up in his mind with theology, that he even winced if he had to speak of personal talk.

'My dear Lady Grace,' he said, in a tone of surprised remonstrance, 'you are talking like a Bishop.'

'Well, certainly,' said Lady Grace, rising, and struggling, she hardly knew how, into a smile, '*nolo episcopari*. You see I do know a little Latin, Mr. Luke.'

'Yes,' said Mr. Luke with a bow, as he pushed back a chair for her, 'and a bit that has more wisdom in it than all other ecclesiastical Latin put together.'

'We're going to leave you gentlemen to smoke your cigarettes,' said Lady Grace. 'We think of going down on the beach for a little, and looking at the sea, which is getting silvery; and by-and-by, I dare say you will not expel us if we come back for a little tea and coffee.'

'Damn it!'

Scarcely had the last trailing skirt swept glimmering out of the pavilion into the mellow slowly-brightening moonlight, than the gentlemen were astounded by this sudden

and terrible exclamation. It was soon found to have issued from Mr. Saunders, who had hardly spoken more than a few sentences during the whole of dinner.

‘What can be the matter?’ was enquired by several voices.

‘My fool of a servant,’ said Mr. Saunders sullenly, ‘has, I find, in packing, wrapped up a small sponge of mine in my disproof of God’s existence.’

‘H’f,’ shuddered Mr. Rose, shrinking from Mr. Saunders’s somewhat piercing tones, and resting his forehead on his hand, ‘my head aches sadly. I think I will go down to the sea, and join the ladies.’

‘I,’ said Mr. Saunders, ‘if you will excuse me, must go and see in what state the document is, as I left it drying, hung on the handle of my jug.’

No sooner had Mr. Saunders and Mr. Rose departed than Dr. Jenkinson began to recover his equanimity somewhat. Seeing this, Mr. Storcks, who had himself during dinner been first soothed and then ruffled into silence, found suddenly the strings of his tongue loosed.

‘Now, those are the sort of young fellows,’ he said, looking after the retreating form of Mr. Saunders, ‘that really do a good deal to

bring all solid knowledge into contempt in the minds of the half-educated. There's a certain hall in London, not far from the top of Regent Street, where I'm told he gives Sunday lectures.'

'Yes,' said Dr. Jenkinson, sipping his claret, 'it's all very bad taste—very bad taste.'

'And the worst of it is,' said Mr. Storke, 'that these young men really get hold of a fact or two, and then push them on to their own coarse and insane conclusions—which have, I admit, to the vulgar eye, the look of being obvious.'

'Yes,' said Dr. Jenkinson, with a seraphic sweetness, 'we should always suspect everything that seems very obvious. Glaring inconsistencies and glaring consistencies are both sure to vanish if you look closely into them.'

'Now, all that about God, for instance,' Mr. Storke went on, 'is utterly uncalled for; and, as young Saunders puts it, is utterly misleading.'

'Yes,' said Dr. Jenkinson, 'it *all* depends upon the way you say it.'

'I hardly think,' said Mr. Stockton with a sublime weariness, 'that we need waste much thought upon *his* way. It is a very common one—that of the puppy that barks

at the heels of the master whose meat it steals.'

'May I,' said Mr. Herbert gently, after a moment's pause, 'ask this, for I am a little puzzled here. Do I understand that Mr. Saunders's arguments may be held, on the face of the thing, to disprove the existence of God?'

Mr. Storks and Mr. Stockton both stared gravely on Mr. Herbert; and said nothing. Dr. Jenkinson stared at him too; but the Doctor's eye lit up into a little sharp twinkle of benign content and amusement, and he said—

'No, Mr. Herbert, I don't think Mr. Saunders can disprove that, nor anyone else either. For the world has at present no adequate definition of God; and I think we should be able to define a thing before we can satisfactorily disprove it. I think so. I have no doubt Mr. Saunders can disprove the existence of God, as he would define Him. All atheists can do that.'

'Ah,' murmured Mr. Stockton, 'nobly said!'

'But that's not the way,' the Doctor went on, 'to set to work—this kind of rude denial. We must be loyal to nature. We must do nothing *per saltum*. We must be patient.

We mustn't leap at Utopias, either religious or irreligious. Let us be content with the knowledge that all dogmas will expand in proportion as we feel they need expansion; for all mere forms are transitory, and even the personality of——'

Fatal word! It was like a match to a cannon.

'Ah, Jenkinson,' exclaimed Mr. Luke, and Dr. Jenkinson stopped instantly, '*we* see what you mean; and capital sense it is too. But you do yourself as much as anyone else a great injustice, in not seeing that the age is composed of two parts, and that the cultured minority is infinitely in advance of the Philistine majority—which alone is, properly speaking, the present; the minority being really the soul of the future waiting for its body, which at present can exist only as a Utopia. It is the wants of this soul that we have been talking over this afternoon. When the ladies come back to us, there are several things that I should like to say; and then you will see what we mean, Jenkinson—and that even poor Rose has really some right on his side.'

At the mention of Mr. Rose's name the Doctor's face again curdled into frost.

'I don't think so.' That was all he said.

CHAPTER II.

‘**W**E could really, Mr. Luke, almost fancy that we heard the Sirens singing, just now,’ said Mrs. Sinclair, when the ladies of the party had returned from their ramble on the shore, with Mr. Rose amongst them, like Apollo leading the Muses.

The coloured lamps were now glowing brightly, with their green and purple clusters; the table was glittering under them, a wilderness of enchanted sparklings; and outside the moonlight was bathing everything, the roof and pillars of the pavilion, the myrtles, and the multitudes of crowding roses, which trembled just a little in the air that they themselves scented.

‘Yes,’ Mrs. Sinclair said, whilst there were some arrangements going on amongst the others with shawls and opera-cloaks, ‘I never saw anything like the sea to-night. Far off the spray amongst the rocks looked like mermaids playing; and at our feet it seemed

as if the little pale waves were whispering and sighing messages to us. I don't think I should like to tell quite all I thought they said to me. And listen,' she cried with a faint sigh, 'is not that the nightingale? It is—I am certain it is!—

The same that oft-times hath
Charmed magic casements opening on the foam
Of perilous seas in faëry lands forlorn.¹

What a night it is, to be sure! We all felt down on the beach as if we were literally breathing in Romance—or—well, I don't know what the right word is.'

'And I,' said Mr. Rose, 'have been explaining to them, that, had they lived in any other age, they would have felt nothing of all this; that they feel it, by virtue of senses that have only been acquired in ours.'

'Yes,' said Mr. Luke, clearing his throat; 'that's quite true, and I want now to try and explain clearly how and why it is true. I was particularly anxious,' he said in a whisper to Laurence as he drew his chair forward, 'to speak of this when your Roman Catholic friend was here; as she seems a very intelligent young lady, and is, I have no doubt, fully alive to some of the grotesquenesses of what she considers to be her creed.'

¹ Keats, *Ode to the Nightingale*.

Mr. Luke resettled himself. On one side of him was Miss Merton, in a pale blue opera cloak, bordered with white fur, and embroidered with gold, something in her large eyes of a subdued sadness ; and on the other side was Mrs. Sinclair, all in white, who looked like a wood-anemone against a background of dark foliage.

‘Now,’ Mr. Luke continued, raising his voice a little, but speaking with a more mellow persuasiveness than usual, ‘we all of us feel, in a general way—I think I may say that we nearly all of us feel—that the cultured minority of the present age is endowed with feelings, sentiments, and powers of insight, not only in advance of its common contemporaries, but in advance of all preceding times. We understand natural beauty, and natural affections, and above all moral beauty, in a new way, all our own. Now, to what is the advance due ? It is all due to culture in its highest connection—its connection with religion. We feel stronger emotions about natural scenery, for just the same reason that we feel stronger emotions about righteousness. And the reason is, that our emotions, in either case, no longer tempt us to draw grotesque inferences from themselves. There’s the whole heart of the matter. We

rest gratefully content with the objects that excite our love; we don't pass away beyond them, and forget them. You had an excellent instance of the old treatment I condemn in those verses of Euripides which Mr. Laurence has translated with so much tenderness. There, you see, you have nature—flowers, meadows, and so forth; and more important still, you have a high conception of virtue. But yet in that poem you have no real feeling for either the flowers or the virtue. The feeling only grazes these, so to speak, and glances off to a shadowy deity beyond, who was no more true, no more *verifiable*, than any of the rest of her kind, male or female, singular or triple. And now,' Mr. Luke went on, turning to Miss Merton, 'here is another illustration of the whole thing—of the advance made by culture in our entire mental state, of which I particularly wanted to talk to you (for in one point at least we agree, even professedly—the doctrine of development), and this is an illustration of it that you in a special way will appreciate. *You*, of course,' said Mr. Luke, 'know something more or less about St. Augustine, I suppose.'

As it was with her reading that Father's account of *his* conversion that Miss Merton in a peculiar way associated her own, she

looked at Mr. Luke with increased interest, feeling at the same time that she had certainly as much knowledge on the subject as he so generously gave her credit for.

‘Well,’ Mr. Luke went on, ‘Augustine was on the whole, you know, the most cultured of all the Fathers, and, considering the early date at which he lived, had in some ways a real insight into Christianity ; so we may safely consider him as the most favourable specimen of the results of the old system. Let us take then the purest and most elevating of all the pleasures of life, and enquire, through him, how it is treated and looked upon by theological Christianity. The eyes, says Augustine, love fair and various forms, and shining and lovely colours ; and all day long they are before me, and solicit my contemplation. “ For ” (and this exquisite sentence I remember in his very words) “ the Light, that queen of colours, bathing all that we can look upon, from morning till evening, let me go where I will, will still keep gliding by me in unnumbered guises, and soothes me whilst I am busy at other things, and am thinking nothing of her.” ’¹

Miss Merton was pleased at the apprecia-

¹ Vide *Aug. Conf.* l. ix. c. 34.

tive tone in which Mr. Luke quoted. Mr. Luke noticed this, and he was pleased also.

‘And now,’ he continued, ‘what return does our gentleman make to the light for its beautiful and constant service to him? Does he thank it? does he praise it? does he seek it? No—’ Mr. Luke here gave a little laugh—‘not a bit of it! He prays to his God that he may be delivered from its insidious snares; he envies the blindness of Tobit, and describes himself as “earnestly groaning” under the temptations of these eyes of his flesh. That is all! There,’ said Mr. Luke, with a confident appeal to Miss Merton, whose expression was now slightly altering, ‘we have in a most pointed form the barbarising results of the old theological religion. And now, put side by side with this, the following expression of the religion of sweet reason, such as culture reveals it to us. It deals with exactly the same sense, and the same pleasures:—

What soul was his, when, from the naked top
Of some bold headland, he beheld the sun
Rise up, and bathe the world in light! He looked—
Ocean and earth, the solid frame of earth
And ocean’s liquid mass beneath him lay
In gladness and deep joy. The clouds were touched
And in their silent faces could be read
Unutterable love. Sound needed none,

Nor any voice of joy ; his spirit drank
 The spectacle : sensation, soul, and form,
 All melted into him ; they swallowed up
 His animal being ; in them did he live,
 And by them did he live ; they were his life.
 In such access of mind, in such high hour
 Of visitation from the living God,
 Thought was not ; in enjoyment it expired ;
 No thanks he breathed, he proffered no request.¹

A sudden sigh here escaped from some one. Mr. Luke looked round.

‘ Ah,’ exclaimed Mr. Stockton, ‘ what a description of prayer ! What a noble, what a magnificent description ! ’

The fashion of Mr. Luke’s countenance changed. He stopped short, he would not proceed a word farther. His whole quotation had been ruined, he felt, by this odious interruption.

‘ I never supposed,’ said Miss Merton, who thought Mr. Luke pausing that she might give in her acquiescence, ‘ I never supposed St. Augustine’s views quite final upon all matters. I dare say there are some things that even I could have taught him.’

She smiled as she said this ; but there was a little embarrassment in her tone which was perceived by Laurence, and which brought him at once to her rescue.

¹ Vide Wordsworth, *Excursion*, Book i.

‘I,’ he said, ‘think the contrast Mr. Luke has drawn even stronger than he has made it. I by no means think that Augustine was afraid of the pleasures of light and sight as they were enjoyed by Wordsworth ; for I can hardly fancy that he could have had the least conception of them. They seem to me a new and peculiar heritage, which *we* may all more or less have part in ; but which by former ages were undreamt of, not rejected. I often myself look back on a certain early walk I took one spring morning in these gardens—amongst the very trees and flowerbeds we are now looking out upon. The fresh softness that was in the air, and all the wandering scents, like dreams or prophecies of summers gone or coming, and the wet light glistening on the dewy leaves, seemed to go at once to the soul—to “melt into me,” as into Wordsworth’s herdsman. Once I surprised myself stooping under a dripping bough, to look upwards at a yellow flower, and watch it lonely against a background of blue sky ; and once I started to find myself quite lost in staring at a red rock, gleaming amongst shrubs and ivy, which a plant of periwinkle spangled with a constellation of purple stars. The colour, the shape, the smell of every leaf and flower—each seemed to

touch me like a note of music; and the bloom of morning mist was over everything.'

'Ah,' said Mrs. Sinclair, her dark eyes gleaming in the moonlight, 'how those spring mornings sometimes make one sick with longing!'

'Yes,' said Laurence, 'with longing—with a vague longing; not always, I am afraid, with thanksgiving or with praise. But I think the feeling in all its moods is the same in some ways. It is a mixing together of outward and inward things—our whole inward lives passing out of us into Nature; Nature melting into us, and growing part of our inward lives, so that all our hopes and fears and memories become embodied things, touching us in scents of flowers, in the breath of the air, in the sparkle of water, or mixing, like Hamadryads, their beings with the trees. Now, could I have described such feelings as these—my own state of mind during my morning walk—to Saint Augustine, he would not have understood me. He would have thought me raving. And my case is not peculiar. These feelings are no private things of my own. They belong to our whole age. And of this,' Laurence went on, 'you may see a very curious proof in a part of our modern literature, which as literature is least

successful. I mean, a certain class of novels : not the works of the greater novelists, still less the works of the professional novel-manufacturers ; not these, but a sort of production almost peculiar to our own time—the novels of amateurs, who write perhaps but a single book during their whole lives ; and that one, with the simple aim of pouring out their own feelings for themselves to contemplate, or of explaining to themselves or others their own histories.'

'And so,' said Mr. Storks, 'you would gauge the refinement of the age by its silliest novels ?'

'I think we too often forget,' said Laurence, 'that a very silly book may be evidently the work of a very clever person ; and may show its author possessed of every gift, except that of literature. And in many of the poor novels I am speaking of, the utter failure of the expression often only calls our attention more strongly to the depth, the delicacy, and the refinement of what the writer has struggled to express. I was reading a girl's novel in the train the other day, called *Love in a Life*. Its long spasms of ungrammatical verbiage, its utter want of knowledge of the world, would have turned the dullest reviewer, in spite of himself, into a

caustic wit. But there was a something all through it, that its authoress was trying—trying to utter, that reminded me of Ariel trying to escape from his tree. What, Lady Ambrose! Have *you* written a novel? No? Then why are you looking so mysterious, and so full of meaning?’

‘Go on, Mr. Laurence,’ said Lady Ambrose. ‘I’ll show you by-and-by.’

‘Well,’ said Laurence, ‘take any one of these novels, and you will find the writer looking on Nature in just that peculiar modern way that we have been talking of. I don’t say you will always find the sentiment in the books, but the books will show you that you would find it in the writers. And this feeling about Nature is but an example of others. Take, as I said, the modern conception of love, and study that too, in these foolish novels. You will find half the folly comes from an attempt to express much, not from success in expressing little.’

A pause followed this. It was broken at last by Allen.

‘I quite agree with Mr. Laurence,’ he said diffidently. ‘I have not much right to judge, I dare say. I am not a great reader; and I can only speak from books. But still-

I know a little of the love poetry of this and of other times; and the poetry of this has always seemed to me far—far the highest. It has seemed to me to give the passion so much more meaning, and such a much greater influence over all life. And this, I suppose, must be because men, as the world goes on, are really learning to love in a higher way than perhaps they themselves are often conscious of.'

'I think some philosopher,' murmured Mrs. Sinclair to Leslie, 'says we feel that we are greater than we know. It must be a great comfort sometimes to know that we are greater than we feel.'

'Is it not Novalis,' went on Allen, 'who says that if all the human race were a single pair of lovers, the difference between mysticism and non-mysticism would cease? Would that have been understood even a hundred years ago? But as to poets, I was thinking of two English poets of our own day especially. Shakespeare may of course have exhibited the working of love more powerfully than they; yet I am sure he could never have conceived its meaning and its nature so deeply. No heroine of his could have understood Mrs. Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese*; nor any hero of

his her husband's love lyrics. What seems to me the thing so peculiarly modern, is this notion of love as something which, once truly attained, would, as Browning says,

make Time break,
Letting us pent-up creatures through
Into Eternity, our due.'¹

'Ah!' murmured Mrs. Sinclair, 'but suppose there is no eternity! I think we had better take what we can, and be thankful. Listen—listen again! "The nightingales, the nightingales!" There, Lord Allen, there is a bit of your Mrs. Browning for you.'

'What, Lord Allen!' said Lady Ambrose, 'and is Mr. Robert Browning a better poet than Shakespeare? I always thought Shakespeare was *quite* our best.'

'It is not a question,' said Laurence, as Allen did not speak, 'of different poets, but of different ages. I have often wondered myself how far *Faust* would have appealed to the author of *Hamlet*, and whether all the spiritual action of the drama, in so far as it relates to the heroine, might not be lost upon him. What a difference between Margaret and Ophelia—not between themselves, but between the parts they play! Shakespeare

¹ Vide Mr. R. Browning's *Dis aliter visum*.

himself *might* have understood Margaret's influence. I doubt it. But even if he had, that would prove little. Shakespeare's was

The prophetic soul

Of the wide world dreaming on things to come ;¹

and the "wide world" of his time would itself have understood nothing of it. But what strikes me still more than the growth of particular feelings, is the infusion and the interpenetration of all. Look at Shakespeare's Sonnets. He loved the objects they were addressed to ; he loved flowers and Nature. But these two sets of things were *connected* only in his mind, they were not *fused*. Take, however, that most typical of all modern poems—the celebrated love-song in *Maud*, and think of that :—

The slender acacia would not shake
 One long milk-bloom on the tree ;
 The white lake-blossom fell into the lake,
 And the pimpernel dozed on the lea ;
 But the rose was awake all night for your sake,
 Knowing your promise to me ;
 The lilies and roses were all awake,
 They sighed for the dawn and thee.

What a passion is here ! We almost hear the lover's pulses as they painfully beat quicker. Our breath catches with his ; and we

¹ Vide Shakespeare, *Sonnet* cvii.

long and long with his longing. And yet hardly a word about his feelings is said directly. The secret is echoed back to us from the scene and from the summer night. It is the milk-bloom of the acacia, the musk of the roses, the stir of the morning breeze, that tells it all to us as if they were living things, and as if a human passion had passed into them for a soul. Now, would the world have understood this in any other times but ours? I don't think even Shakespeare's Jessica would, nor Dante's Beatrice, nor Petrarch's Laura, nor Horace's Lydia, nor Plato's Diotima, nor Homer's Helen.'

'Listen!' exclaimed Mr. Rose eagerly, as soon as Laurence stopped; 'will you let me read one passage out of my work which bears upon this very point—in fact, sums up exactly what you have been saying? It occurs,' said Mr. Rose, who was sitting ready under one of the lamps with some printer's proofs before him, 'in my *Essay on Capacity*. "*But chief*"—this is the passage I mean—"*But chief amongst the new things which the heart of man has come to the understanding of, is the passion of love, in its distinctly modern form. The goddess of this love is no longer the Aphrodite of the Greeks, or the Mary of the Christians. She is a mysterious hybrid*

being, in whose veins is the blood of both of them. She is Mary in her desire of the Creator; she is Aphrodite in her desire of the creature; and in her desire of the creation, she is also Artemis." ('Oh, this will never do—this will never do!' muttered Dr. Jenkinson to himself, tapping with his feet on the ground.) "“Into the strange passion,”” Mr. Rose went on, “of which hers is the tutelage, there have melted the sounds of woods and of waters, and the shapes and the hues of mountains, and the savour of airs and winds, and the odours of all flowers. All the joys, indeed, of the senses have fallen into it, like streams into one sea. And with the joys of the spirit it has been likewise. But whereas the senses have contributed their joys mainly, the spirit has contributed its sorrows and pains as well. Throughout this love, despite its fulness of life, there yet runs also a constant taint of death, of which it needs cleansing—grotesque troubles and misgivings of conscience, and cloistral meditations, and fantastic repentances. For this very reason, however, is it the more wholly expressive to us of the man’s inner development. It shows us how all his desires, senses, and powers of feeling have been growing together, and coalescing into a single organism, capable

of quite new sets of pleasures, and responding to far finer movements from without."

'H'm,' said Mr. Luke slowly, in a tone of meditative commendation, 'there's a great deal of truth in that—a very great deal—if the fellow,' he added to himself, 'would only put it a little better.'

'Are you *quite* sure,' said Dr. Jenkinson, looking round him in an agony of suppressed irritation, 'that anyone at all feels all these things, beyond the very few people who talk about them?'

'Yes,' said Mr. Rose, smiling with a honeyed gravity, and wholly unconscious of the Doctor's animus, 'all feel thus who have any part or lot in the world's development.'

'You,' said the Doctor, turning sharply away from Mr. Rose, 'think so, Laurence, don't you, because you find some of the same sort of phrases in novels? I don't think you'll find very much thought in those novels—not very much. They are effeminate foolish books.'

'Yes,' said Allen with an assenting voice that much pleased the Doctor, 'a great deal of this increased depth and refinement of feeling, I know, is very good—all of it, I dare say, may be. But still, if left to itself, it must tend—indeed, I have often seen it tend

—to make men effeminate, as Dr. Jenkinson says, and unfit for work. Now, I dare say Mr. Luke will call me a barbarian, but I am going to venture to say that, in spite of all that is said against it, that barbarous thing sport—shooting, deer-stalking, hunting—is of great value, especially to people who are not barbarians, as a kind of mental tonic. It makes them active and spirited—it must do so: it gives them presence of mind, and a readiness to exert themselves; and though sport may in one sense be a self-indulgence, it is a self-indulgence that is constantly teaching all sorts of self-denial.’

‘My dear Lord Allen,’ said Mr. Luke, ‘I most entirely agree with you. It does seem, I admit, at first sight, a somewhat singular thing, that the result of the latest civilisation should be to give men leisure to return to the occupations of their earliest barbarism—and those too deprived of their one justification—necessity. But still these barbarous sports must, as you say, if not pursued too exclusively, give a valuable moral tone to minds whose refinement might else become weakness. Only the worst of the matter, as it actually stands, is this—that the majority of people who do follow sport, are the very people who have no refinement that

needs strengthening, but merely an idle aimless strength that needs refining. And you must remember, Lord Allen, that the man who is gluttonous of aimless bodily action is no better than the man who is an epicure in aimless mental emotion.'

'And so,' said Donald Gordon, with devout solemnity, 'this is what we must remedy in our new Republic. Our gentlemen there must have both sides of their nature developed equally; and they must be at once so intellectual and so manly, as to be content that partridges and foxes shall die exclusively for them, without their living exclusively for partridges and foxes.'

'Exactly so,' said Mr. Luke drily.

'Some one observed this afternoon,' said Allen, turning a little stiffly to Donald Gordon, 'how one could see the expression of a girl's face changed by the influence of a little genuine mental culture. I have noticed the same thing in men's faces, under the influence of a little genuine bodily culture. And I think myself that the moors of your country, or a river in Norway, or a good cruise in a yacht, may go—well, at least half as far towards making a complete man, as the study of books, and art, and poetry, in an arm-chair, or in a picture-gallery.'

‘I think that is so true,’ said Miss Merton softly to him in a whisper, for Dr. Jenkinson had begun to speak.

‘But,’ the Doctor was saying, ‘you must want something besides looking at pretty scenery, and falling in love, and shooting. I think you want something besides that to make life complete. You will want to exercise your intellect—your reason.’

‘Yes,’ said Allen, ‘and I defend all this voluntary physical exercise and excitement, because I think it makes the mind even more healthy than it does the body.’

‘Yes,’ said Dr. Jenkinson with a smile, ‘I think that’s right.’

‘You, gentlemen,’ interposed Lady Grace, ‘seem to be taking very good care of yourselves; but are we women to shoot and take all this exercise also?’

‘That,’ said Mr. Luke with a courtly smile, ‘we defer to your superior wisdom. There are, however, two helps to education, akin to exercise, in which both sexes will share, and which in a perfect state of society would be most important in their results. I mean travelling, and the halving of our lives between town and country. The completeness, the many-sidedness of such culture as there is amongst us, is in a great measure due to

these; but it is only slowly that we are learning to use them properly. Of course, Jenkinson, you understand all this—no man can do so better. It is simply the music and gymnastic of the Greeks. It is simply true education, which is but another name for culture. And in the cultivated man, thought, and taste, and feeling, and spirit are really all one, and fused together. Could we but look forward to a time when all or even the greater part of those one meets would unite these priceless gifts, there might then indeed be some satisfaction and some hope in life.'

'And don't you want goodness?' said Dr. Jenkinson, all his sharpness returning; 'do you want no sense of duty, and right, and wrong?'

'Yes,' said Laurence, 'but we have included that already. We have found that that is pre-supposed in every educated pleasure. It is that that gives even our lightest conversation its best sparkle, and beads its surface over with its bright, crisp foam of half-conscious irony. The moral ideal is a note, as it were, which we are always hearing, and with which our daily talk makes continual harmonies, because it is never pitched in unison with it. Thus we talk

of killing time, and so on, as being the great end of our lives; of money or position being the only thing to marry for; and of marriage ties as if they were always a weariness, or a grotesque torture.'

'And thus,' said Leslie, 'we say a man has had, *par excellence*, a success, when he has, for his own selfish pleasure, done a woman the greatest injury possible.'

'And thus,' said Donald Gordon softly, 'when he does not tell all the world he has done so, we say he is a perfect gentleman.'

'And do you want no religion?' said Dr. Jenkinson, paying no attention to all this, but again turning to Mr. Luke.

'My dear Jenkinson,' said Mr. Luke, 'you and I agree upon these matters so well, that I think you must be trying to misunderstand us. Can religion and morals be separated? and are not they both included in what we mean by culture? Is it not in virtue of culture—of that nice and complex discrimination—that we can tell at once when we come across a genuine *logion* of Jesus amongst the sayings vulgarly supposed to be most distinctive of Him? Think, for instance,' Mr. Luke continued, 'what a beautiful and profound harmony is at once made

amongst our heartstrings, if culture have really tuned them, by such a story as that of the woman taken in adultery, or by the parable of the Prodigal Son, or by such simple pregnant sayings as, “*ὑπάγω καὶ ἔρχομαι πρὸς ὑμᾶς,*” and then turn for a moment to the theological accounts of the Trinity! Why,’ exclaimed Mr. Luke with a sudden jauntiness, ‘to sit on the key-board of an organ would make music compared to the discord, the jangling, the string-breaking that Church Catechisms, and Athanasian Creeds, and Episcopal speculations on the personality of the Creator, make on the musical instrument of the cultured mind. Ah,’ Mr. Luke continued, ‘could the Founder of Christianity only have found men of more culture as His immediate disciples and reporters—could He only have secured a biographer as simply honest as poor Boswell was——Well, well, but it’s no use speculating about what might have been. Religion has had bad times hitherto, but now at last we—some of us, at least—are seeing the way to make them better; you yourself, Jenkinson, amongst the number. And all this is due to that very thing which we say is the essence of the best human life—culture; culture which is neither religion, nor morality, nor taste, nor intellect, nor know-

ledge, nor wide reading, but the single result of all—and this,' Mr. Luke added, 'showing itself to the full—doing itself complete justice, through—as our friends have already said—what we call polish and high-breeding, and refinement of manner, and of manners.'

'Surely you,' said Mr. Stockton, turning to Dr. Jenkinson with the most mollifying deference, 'must agree with us that the present century has seen the soul of man widening out, with all its marvellous powers, and displaying new riches of beauty like an unfolding flower. But whilst we value—and none can value more than I—our higher flights of imagination, our finer forms of love, and poetry, and worship, I am not blind to the great agent that is at the bottom of all this change. I mean the emancipated human intellect, with all its manifold apparatus of discovery and conquest—that great liberator of life, and thought, and religion.'

'There is some truth in that,' said Dr. Jenkinson, not ungraciously, 'but I think you are all putting it in a wrong way. And, Luke,' he added with a little more causticity, 'to understand Christianity, you must know something of other religions too. You must study the great religions of the East, and compare them with those of the West.

No religion can be understood by its own light only.'

'In our ideal city,' said Mr. Rose, 'as I saw it in my brief Apocalypse, you will find a home and a temple for every creed, and for every form of worship.'

'What!' exclaimed Lady Ambrose, 'does Dr. Jenkinson want us to introduce Juggernaut and his car into England?'

'May I ask you one question,' broke in Mr. Herbert suddenly, 'a question which at times, I confess, seems to me not without importance! Will this religion of yours, as you told us in the afternoon it was based on the discrimination between good and evil, also involve a discrimination between life and death? Will it, I mean, point to any other life beyond this, or will it not? Is whatever evil and sorrow we patiently suffer, a thing which, if it do not bring its reward to us here, will never bring us any reward at all? And shall we call the death of the noble sufferer blessed for no other reason than that he rests from his labours and his works do not follow him?'

'Dear me! dear me!' said Dr. Jenkinson petulantly to himself. 'These sort of questions ought never to be asked in that

hard abrupt way. You can't answer them—you can't answer them.'

Mr. Stockton, however, found no difficulty with *his* answer.

'As to that,' he said, 'each man would think as he pleased, and his thoughts would shape themselves to meet the deepest needs of his life. In the state of society we long for, the belief in a future life would be open to all to accept or to reject. The only thing to guard against would be any definite public opinion on the matter, one way or the other; for in any definite public opinion, remember, there is the germ of all dogmatism and of all persecution. Public opinion, in society as it ought to be, would be a frictionless fluid, if I may borrow a metaphor from science, in which no adventitious obstacle from prejudice or otherwise would impede the progress of any view that its own merits set in motion.'

Mr. Luke was certainly an unfortunate man. Mr. Stockton had again, in part at least, expressed the exact thing which in other words he was going to have said himself. Mr. Luke, however did not flinch. He boldly took the bull by the horns.

'True,' he said; 'that metaphor is ingenious, and explains exactly what we want to explain. That *is* one of the great conditions

of a truly cultivated society, what Mr. Stockton calls a frictionless public opinion — a public opinion which shall let every system, every creed, every philosophy of life, stand or fall on its own practical verifiable merits; and this we shall get, too, if we can only banish two things, prejudice and ignorance, of which last,' Mr. Luke added, looking studiously away from Mr. Stockton, 'by far the deadliest form is the fetish-worship of useless knowledge.'

'Well,' said Miss Merton, 'I suppose that this is all that any of us would ask, who really and truly believe in what we profess to believe.'

'Of course it is,' said Mr. Luke, 'everything—everything.'

'And I'm *quite* sure,' said Lady Grace, 'that in a society where the tone is so nobly liberal, and where all have such a true and burning admiration of the morally beautiful, it will be quite impossible that woman's life shall not be seen to be what it really is—a thing as capable as men's of high aims, and independent purposes, and not, as it were, entirely sunk in theirs. I, Mr. Luke, in face of such a public opinion as you speak of, should have little fear for our cause. I think, under God, it would prosper there.'

‘Of course it would,’ said Mr. Luke. ‘If culture enables us to detect beauty and to prize it, what should it enable us to prize more than womanhood, with all its exquisite capabilities developed to their utmost? Life has no greater ornament than cultured womanhood.’

‘Except cultured manhood,’ said Lady Grace, unconsciously giving Mr. Luke a slight wound by her generous and unexpected return of his royal compliment. ‘Ah,’ she sighed to herself with a look at Mr. Luke, ‘and he does not believe in God—or thinks he does not! I suppose it must needs be that offences come; but I wish they did not come by such good men. However—I trust that it is all really for the best. And then—there is no such thing as eternal punishment. One may be thankful to feel sure of that.’

‘I am afraid you will think me very troublesome,’ said Mr. Herbert, who had been talking to Laurence in a low tone for the last few minutes, ‘but there is one question more I should like to ask you. I want to know if you, who see the many delicate beauties of life, and the countless positions it may be viewed from,—I want to know if you will teach the lower, the commoner classes,

who look up to you as models, to quote poetry, and to be enquiring and sceptical also?’

‘I hope not, indeed,’ broke in Lady Ambrose with vigour; ‘and as to our being their models, Mr. Herbert, I’m sure you can’t mean that. It seems to me one of the very worst things in these times that they will take us for their models. However, I think it is really a good deal our fault, and that it comes very much from our giving our maids so many of our old clothes to wear. That sort of thing puts notions into their heads. Now, here at any rate is *one* reform, that is implied in our Republic;—I don’t like that word *Republic*, by the way—we must put a stop to all this imitation of ourselves. Isn’t that so, Mr. Laurence?’

‘Thank you, Lady Ambrose,’ said Mr. Herbert, rising, ‘thank you. I think it altogether a wise—nay, more than wise, an essential thing, to keep these wide speculations from spreading beyond the only circles that they are really fitted for. I have to go in-doors now, as I have a few matters to arrange to-night; but I am much obliged to you all for what you have taught me about culture, and enlightenment, and society, as it ought to be.’

‘The difficulty is,’ said Lady Ambrose,

as Mr. Herbert was walking away, 'how' to keep all this thought, and so forth, to ourselves. One thing I'm quite certain of, that we really do a great deal of harm without thinking of it, by the way in which we speak our minds out before servants, and that sort of people, without in the least considering what may come of it. Now, what do you think of this, as a plan for making our ideal state a really good and contented place?—the upper classes should speak a different language from the lower classes. Of course we should be able to speak theirs, but they would not be able to speak ours. And then, you see, they would never hear us talk, or read our books, or get hold of our ideas; which, after all, is what does all the mischief. And yet,' said Lady Ambrose with a sigh, 'that's not the great difficulty. The great difficulty would be about daughters and younger sons, and how to give them all enough to keep them going in the world. However, this we can talk of in a minute. But—' here Lady Ambrose put her hand in her pocket, and a sound was heard as of rustling paper.

'I really do believe,' said Laurence, 'that Lady Ambrose *has* written a novel, although she denies it; and there she is going to read

a bit of it now, as a specimen of her own culture.'

'No,' said Lady Ambrose, 'really and truly. And if I had written a novel, Mr. Laurence, I should not have the cruelty to inflict it upon you. No; but what I have here,' she said at last, producing a manuscript, 'though it is not mine, is next door to a novel, and in some respects better than one. It is a sort of memoir of herself, written by a certain lady I know. I am betraying no confidence in showing it to you; as she herself has lent it to a good many friends, and as long as her name is not mentioned, she is by way of wishing to have it circulated. She has, in fact, consulted me about having it printed. Now I want you, Mr. Laurence, to look through some of it, and tell me if the writer is not really a person of culture. Perhaps you would not mind reading out a little of it.'

'Am I to read it a through?' asked Laurence, as he took the seat which Mr. Rose gave up to him at the table.

'No, no,' said Lady Ambrose. 'Just pick out the best bits—a page here, and a page there.'

'Well,' said Laurence, 'I will, at any rate, start with the beginning. Now, are all of us

ready to be let into the secrets of a young lady's soul?—

“ *One often feels a longing—who has not felt it?—in the hurry and trouble of life to pause for a little while and look back upon the past, which we too too often forget, and see what it is we have grown from. We long to see how it has fared with ourselves—our own selves—our characters.*’

‘I think you may skip the beginning,’ said Lady Ambrose, ‘it’s a little dull. Turn over a page or two.’

“ *How strangely do they come back to me, those distant irrevocable days!*” Will that do?’ asked Laurence.

‘Yes,’ said Lady Ambrose, ‘I think so—go on there.’

“ *—those distant irrevocable days, when the world was all new to me, and each experience was fresh and delightful, and I knew nothing of what self-reproach could mean. Ah, me! how times have changed since then! I sometimes fancy that I am hardly worthy now to look back upon my own past. I was gifted naturally with a curious warmth and sincerity of nature, that must have been very beautiful. But my peculiar gift, my own own gift, was a power of sympathy with others, by which quite naturally I used to throw myself*

into their places, understand their difficulties, and excite myself with their interests. When I was yet quite a child, that, I know, is what men felt in me—I never cared for boys—one man especially. It was then that life began for me, and what it all meant broke on me like a revelation. I, in my simplicity, never dreamt of his being more than a friend—I am not sure even that he was my dearest friend. I certainly never tried to charm him. But I did charm him, nevertheless, quite unconsciously. And he loved me passionately, devotedly, child as I was. Ah, God! when will another ever feel the same for me? And I—‘O, my lost, my rejected friend! come back to me,’ sometimes I still cry in my solitude; ‘poor, and obscurely connected as you are, come back to me!’ I shall never forget—poor little me!—the solemn shock of the moment, how my heart stood still, how all the blood came rushing into my cheek, when all of a sudden, as it seemed to me, and without any warning, he asked me to be his wife. Everything seemed to grow dizzy before me. It seemed to me as if the day of judgment had come. (Alas! will there ever be a day of judgment at all? is what I now ask.) I don’t know what I said. I only remember distinctly my throwing myself into my mother’s arms,

and crying like a child—and I was one—as if my very heart would break. ‘I am only a child!’ that is what I said. ‘Oh, mother, I am such a child!’ The pathos of the scene often comes back to me even now—a shadowy timid memory, wondering if I shall give it harbour. I remember, too, how I said my prayers that night, and how I asked God——”’

‘I think you needn’t read that,’ said Lady Ambrose, ‘go on a page or two further.’

“*I spent much of my time sketching.*” Shall I go on there?’ said Laurence. “*“I had always a curiously appreciative eye for natural beauty.”* Will that do? Or shall I go on here—I think this is better—at the next paragraph?—“*Oh the great waste of love in this our world.*”’

‘Yes, go on there,’ said Mrs. Sinclair and several others.

“*Oh the great waste of love in this our world! How many a true heart would have given itself to me, could I only honestly and unreservedly have opened out to it all the depths of mine, and received it! And why did I never do so? It may be that I have known none who could really understand me—none that I could really love. But does that excuse me, not for not loving them, but*

for making as though I did love them, and so ruining their lives and searing my own? sending them in the end to their brandy-bottles, and their gaming-hells, and their wild Cremornes, and myself—to the mental state in which I am now!

“Have I then lost it for ever—lost all hope of love? and must I quietly take up with my unappreciated loneliness? If it is so, if, indeed, it is so, surely I have brought it on myself. Was there not one—not my earliest lover—but another, who with a devotion I understood far more fully, laid himself at my feet, and offered me all his man’s devotion, and his man’s sympathy! Why, why in my madness did I send him from me, penniless as he was—but what of that?—driving him to death, and leaving myself to desolation? How does the image of his pale still face upturned towards the Indian star-light, with eyes which no star-light could ever touch any more, rise before me—his hand on his breast, and clasping with its last grasp a locket with my picture in it! Yes, I see him there, though I did not see him. I know how he must have looked, with his heart bullet-pierced—noble, beautiful in death. Unworthy as I was of you, my true-hearted one, too late, too late, did I learn my own unworthiness. I was sitting in the window of our house at

Ventnor, when the letter came that told me. It was evening; and I had been looking out through the summer twilight at the sea and at the sunset. As I read the letter, it dropped from my hand. I gave a gasp. I repressed a shrill cry. I felt a choking sensation in my throat; but I was very proud, and I even repressed a sob. I only, with entire calmness, turned my head towards the sea, and sighed a sigh deep-drawn as if my soul were in it. My cheek was pale, my eyes were wild and wistful—full of a solemn new earnestness. What the exact thoughts were that were busy in me, I cannot tell. All I am conscious of was this, that far, far off were the great crimson spaces of evening sky and a trail of rippled splendour on the sea. One great violet cloud fringed with a border of living fire, that seemed to be eating into it, hung just above the place where the sun had gone down; and over this, in a pale liquid solitude of hushed colour, was the evening star, trembling like a tear-drop. I was always sensitive to colour; and somehow or other this sunset relieved me—went right to my heart with a quiet sense of healing. That evening was, I think, one of the great points in my life. I seemed ever after to see my own character more clearly—how deep were my own capacities for feeling,

and also how strangely Nature could enter in and comfort me, when all human sympathy would have seemed intrusive. That night, when I went upstairs, I hardly knew myself. There was a wild look in my eyes—an inexpressible mournfulness and an inexpressible longing. Two or three long tendrils of hair had got loose, and hung over my forehead with a kind of wild languor. ‘What is there that men can see in me to attract them?’ I had often said to myself. I think then a something of what it was began to dawn upon me. ‘And he—he, the true, the gallant, the devoted, he has lost all this,’ I gasped, turning away from the glass; and, throwing myself on my knees by the bed, the sob I had so long suppressed broke forth, and I tried to pray——” h’m—and so on, and so on, and so on——’

‘You needn’t read all those bits about the prayers,’ said Lady Ambrose. ‘I don’t think it is quite reverent.’

‘Well,’ said Laurence, ‘here’s a new stage of her life. Let us go on here. “*And now, from the bleak desolation of my present existence, I peer wistfully out on all sides, and see if any will bring the love to me that I so much crave for.*”’

‘Poor thing!’ said Mrs. Sinclair, with a little sigh.

‘I’m afraid,’ said Lady Ambrose, ‘I must mention, by the way, that the lady is married, and remarkably well married too.’

“*Here in the old house with its quiet gables,*” Laurence went on reading, “*I sit in my own room, and watch the sunset dying away over the yellowing autumn woods, itself the colour of a belated autumn leaf. I watch it alone—yes, thank heaven, alone. I manage to steal for an hour or two away from those people of whom the house is full. Who is there amongst them that can understand me? whose spirit meets mine on equal terms? I laugh with them, I talk with them, I jest with them, and they think they know me. But ah! the weariness, the far-offness of it all——*”

‘It is entirely her own fault,’ said Lady Ambrose, ‘that she has these people here. Her husband is devoted to the country and the turnips for their own sake, and would never see a soul but a few of the neighbouring squires and parsons, if she did not make him. In London, you know, she is nearly always by herself. At least,’ Lady Ambrose added, ‘he’s very rarely with her.’

‘A little further on,’ said Laurence, ‘it seems that all the visitors have gone; and she has been to pay a visit to the parson’s wife.’

‘You may be sure she was quite by herself if she did that,’ said Lady Ambrose.

‘Here,’ Laurence continued, ‘is a description of the visit. “*What sweet eyes the little thing had! What a look of trustfulness in her face! A good and pure, and therefore a happy woman, if ever there was one. What a trust in those eyes of hers! What an innocence! What a sweet content! There is no purple shadow of care under her eyes—(people say I darken mine artificially. Alas! heaven knows there is little need for me to do that!)* There is no secret trouble discernible in her lips—no languor in her air! What does she know of life, with its troubles, its distractions, its sins? Ah! were I but like her—I, world-worn and world-weary, sickened with pomps, and vanities, and soiled affections, and hollow homage—were I but worthy that she should talk to me! ‘Don’t talk to me,’ I felt inclined to say. ‘You wouldn’t if you knew—if you could know! Oh, how far better are you than I! You little dream when I show myself demurely in my seat in the village church, bowing at the Glorias, or kneeling with my face hid in my hands, you little imagine what a woman you see there. You little dream what strange thoughts unbidden mix themselves up for me with the

hymn-music; what wild regrets, what bitter reveries, what strange scenes and figures, fill my mind as I kneel before the Communion-table. Why could I not have been content like you with a quiet lot, a toiling honest husband like you? Is there not something holy, even in his dull sermons, if you only look on them in the lovely light of duty? Why does my heart vibrate with the troubled wailing music of many sorrows, many longings, of which you do not even dream the existence? Oh! what a far higher, far nobler woman are you than I, in every way!"

‘And now,’ said Lady Ambrose, seeing that Laurence had shut the book, ‘I want to know if all this is a specimen of culture, and if you would call the writer a cultivated person; because she is really one of the most delightful people I know to talk to; and if this is what you call culture—though I think, in her case, it’s a little bit affected, you know—but then she never lets you see all this when you talk to her—I do quite from the bottom of my heart give up about culture being priggish, and bookish, and all that; and since, as you say, it really must include religion, I don’t see what we could wish for more, to make life—humanly speaking—perfect. Of course we shall do *good* sometimes

—I mean, not forget the poor—there's something so wretchedly heartless in that, I think. And then, too, politics——'

'Yes,' repeated Allen, 'politics——'

'Of course,' said Lady Ambrose, 'it is necessary that some of us should look after politics, because if we did not somebody else would. But still—(are you a Liberal, Lord Allen?)—but still, within a limit, I think the *less* we meddle the better.'

'Much, Lady Ambrose,' said Mr. Rose, who had been somewhat put out by this digression, 'much is, no doubt, to be got over in your friend's style; nor do I think the culture displayed in her memoirs, even apart from that——'

'Oh, but you mustn't judge her only by her writings,' said Lady Ambrose. 'When you meet her, she is not a bit like them.'

'Amateurs in writing rarely are,' said Laurence. 'Their writings are simply the foot-notes of their lives, where they tell you what they have not skill enough to bring into the text.'

'She draws beautifully,' Lady Ambrose went on, 'and is really the brightest of creatures—so witty, and with such a sense of the ridiculous! And really, to hear her tell a bit of scandal—not that I at all approve

of scandal myself—I always think it's so uncharitable——'

'Ah,' said Donald Gordon gently, 'I have the very highest opinion of scandal. It is founded on the most sacred of things—that is, Truth, and it is built up by the most beautiful of things—that is, Imagination.'

'Well, Mr. Gordon,' said Lady Ambrose, smiling, 'we won't talk about that now. But as for what you say about style, Mr. Rose, it is rather jerky, and so forth, I admit. However, that's the way with us women. Indeed, I often think that if women had invented language, it would have consisted mainly of interjections, and that its only stop would have been a note of exclamation.'

Mr. Rose was much annoyed at these interruptions.

'I wanted to say,' he went on, as soon as Lady Ambrose had ceased, 'that I think your friend's memoirs more instructive from their very shortcomings, as showing how the human mind—even if not exceptionally gifted—has come to be an organism of increased delicacy and capacity, except when stunted by the necessity of work, or of occupation that is other than voluntary, and chosen for any object beyond itself. You have here, you see, that same modern sense of the blending together'

of the outer and inner worlds ; there is the same delicate discrimination between the æsthetic aspects of the different stages of life, and the nice gradation of moral colours : there is the same fine self-consciousness, and consequent endeavour to give tone and quality to her memories as they pass by her, in exquisite and complex ways.'

'Yes,' exclaimed Leslie suddenly, who had spoken but little all the evening, 'here, I think, is the crowning work of culture. It teaches each of us to look back upon his own life, with all its wants, its relations, and its possibilities, all its wasted hours and its affections trifled away or degraded—it teaches us to look back upon all this with quite a new kind of discrimination. The beauty of youth, with all its buoyancy and innocence, wakes in us of the modern world a more wistful and solemn regret ; we are more keenly alive to the pathos of failure ; to the sadness of the cold shadows that will often darken the whole inward landscape, and the ravage made by the storms that will sometimes break over it ; and to the gleams of sunshine fitfully re-appearing, often only touching its distant wolds. And the charm of this is,' Leslie went on, with a short laugh, 'that however disastrous our lives may have been, what-

ever shipwreck we may have made of ourselves or others, let us only look back on this with the eyes of culture, whilst "*es wiederholt die Klage des Lebens labyrinthisch irren Lauf,*" and the whole retrospect becomes a delightful picture, the more impressive and suggestive from its landslips, its broken roads, and its waste places. I really think one is repaid for having made oneself quite lonely, and deserted, and friendless, by the pleasure one gets from contemplating one's own situation.'

'I cannot bear that man,' whispered Lady Ambrose to Miss Merton. 'Didn't you notice the nasty way in which all that was said? But—good gracious, Mr. Laurence, what is that bell ringing for in the house? Is that for us to leave off talking? We have not half done yet.'

Laurence smiled, and looked a little shy, and murmured that he did not think it was so late. 'I don't know whether you'll mind,' he said at last, 'but our Rector is going to give us a little evening service. He proposed it this afternoon in the garden, and I could not well refuse.'

'Mind it!' exclaimed Lady Ambrose. 'I should think not.'

'Service!' said Dr. Jenkinson briskly;

‘yes, come and let us go to that. I think,’ he said, looking round him, ‘that you will find the religion we have is the best for us at present. I think so. And Christianity,’ he added, turning to Mr. Stockton, ‘really embraces all religions, even any honest denial of itself.’

There was now a general movement towards the house.

‘I’m afraid,’ said Mrs. Sinclair to Leslie, ‘that you’re not of a very happy disposition. You don’t look happy, somehow. And yet I think you might be, if you only tried. I suppose *you’re* not out of spirits like Mr. Laurence, because you don’t believe in the Trinity, are you? Just look at the sea now. Isn’t that beautiful? Don’t you care for that? But I, you know,’ she added with a sigh, ‘disagree with Mr. Luke. I want the notion of a personal deity, to make me enjoy nature. I want my thought to pass away to him. But I don’t mean a vague deity; but some one whom I have myself made a deity, and who, therefore, I can be quite sure exists—do you see?’

‘My dear,’ said Lady Ambrose again to Miss Merton, ‘I really cannot bear Mr. Leslie. I feel quite sure he’s a bad man. And the way he sneers and laughs at things does

go so against me. I wouldn't have that man inside my house, do you know, for anything. I know you don't think so; but then you Roman Catholics believe so much, you can afford to be liberal. Not that I myself am at all bigoted; indeed, the one thing I think we want is toleration and charity. And do you know, my dear,' Lady Ambrose added as they were entering the house, 'I have a set of eight cousins, all unmarried; and when I look at those girls' faces, I do confess, my dear, that I positively wish your religion was true; for then they could all go into convents. One doesn't like those half-and-half Protestant things, you know.'

Just at this moment, emerging from the house, pale and disappointed, appeared the figure of Mr. Saunders.

'It is thrown away,' he exclaimed; 'my disproof of God's existence. The under-housemaid did it! I am pleased to discover, however, that she previously read through a part; so it has not perished, I trust, without emancipating one spirit. What! are you all going indoors?'

'Yes,' said Mr. Storks, laying his arm on Mr. Saunders's shoulder; 'and you had better come too. Young man,' he said in a voice of commanding kindness, 'you should

never in this virulent way deny God's existence. What rational man believes in it ?'


'I was looking before dinner,' said Mr. Rose, who with Laurence was bringing up the rear, 'at the books in your uncle's pavilion in the garden ; and I saw there, in a closed case, a copy of the *'Cultes secrets des Dames Romaines.'*

'Well ?' said Laurence a little stiffly. 'It has been locked up for years.'

'I conceived as much,' said Mr. Rose gently. 'As you do not seem to set much store by the work, I will give you thirty pounds for it.'

BOOK V.

CHAPTER I.

NCE more the theatre was brightly lighted ; and once more the congregation was assembled in the tier of boxes. There was not so much excitement as there had been in the morning ; indeed, the reserved decorum that reigned might have been said to partake almost of the nature of apathy. When, however, Dr. Seydon entered, none could deny that he did indeed look a reverend man ; and the very aspect of the place seemed to grow devotional at his presence. Lady Ambrose perceived with a full heart that he was duly habited in a surplice ; and her bosom warmed with a sense of safety and of comfort as he took his place and solemnly produced his prayer-book. Nor was Lady Ambrose alone in this sudden stir of feeling. There was another of the worshippers who was moved even more strongly, though in a slightly different way. Many starts had been given on the stage in that

theatre; but none of these, it may be safely said, ever equalled one now given in the boxes, as Dr. Jenkinson, who had been kneeling with his face hid in his hands, raised his eyes, and saw for the first time who it was confronting him—no obscure rural clergyman, as he had anticipated, but that illiberal apologist of superstition, whose officious bigotry had robbed the Upper House of its most enlightened spiritual peer. Dr. Jenkinson, however, with the heroism of a true martyr, suffered bravely for his faith in the comprehensiveness of Christianity. His face assumed, in another moment, an expression of cherubic suavity; in his gentlest and devoutest tones he was soon taking his part in the whole service, and that too with such an exquisite clearness of articulation, that, amongst the confused murmurs of the rest, the entire evening office sounded like a duet between him and Dr. Seydon. It is true that there was something in the ring of this one audible voice that gave the latter a sense of something being wrong somewhere; but luckily, being a little shortsighted, he could not recognise the owner of it; and Dr. Jenkinson, feeling no manner of call to endure the sermon, retired furtively as soon as the prayers were over.

‘Weren’t they read beautifully!’ said Lady Ambrose to Lady Grace in a whisper. ‘Oh, how glad I shall be to hear him preach once again!’ she added, as Dr. Seydon, having risen from his knees, retired, his hands clasped before him, through the side door. Lady Ambrose, however, was entirely alone in this gladness. Most of the others dreaded the sermon that was imminent, and some even meditated following Dr. Jenkinson. But events were too quick for them. Hardly, it seemed, had Dr. Seydon left the stalls, than the curtain drew rapidly up, and displayed again the gorge in the Indian Caucasus, only with a preacher in it very different from the one who had stood there in the morning. The whole congregation gave a sudden gasp of surprise. It was not Dr. Seydon that they saw. It was Mr. Herbert.

With a gracious gravity he advanced towards the footlights; and made a slight bow to the house—a bow of deprecation and apology.

‘A little while ago, in the garden,’ he said, ‘I confessed to our kind host, Mr. Laurence, that there were a few things that I should like quietly to say to you; and Mr. Laurence has become sponsor for you all, and has promised, in your names, that you would suffer me to say them here. It is true,’ Mr. Herbert

went on, with a smile and a wave of his hand, 'that when I look round me at this glittering semicircle, I begin to feel not a little shy of you, and to repent of my own temerity. You, however, have given me to-day so much good food for reflection, that I feel bound, in the commonest honesty, to make what poor return I can. So remember, that if I weary you, you have really brought it upon yourselves.

'Well—to begin, then. You think me—you need not deny it, for I know you think me—a somewhat crotchety and melancholy individual, averse to modern knowledge and to modern progress, and seeing, as a rule, everything very yellow indeed, with his jaundiced eyes. But I think myself that I am not by any means so obstinate and so wrong-headed as I am quite aware that I appear to you; nay, my own opinion is that I err, rather, in not being quite obstinate enough. It is true that I have persistently pointed out that England is at present given over wholly to ignoble pursuits, and is ruining herself with deadly industries. But I have never said hitherto, so far as I know, that we might not rally, and that a brighter future might not be in store for us. Nay, I hailed a piece of news to-day with the most unfeigned delight, which

seemed an omen to me that such a brighter future actually was in store for us. In a paper that reached me this afternoon there was a letter on the prospects of the English iron trade; and I read in that letter that nineteen foundries in Middlesborough have been closed within the last three months, and the Moloch fires in their blast-furnaces extinguished; that ten more foundries in the same place are scarcely able to continue work, and must very shortly be closed likewise; and that the dense smoke-cloud that so long has darkened that whole country is beginning to clear away, and will open ere long upon astonished human eyes, that have never yet beheld it, the liquid melted blue of the deep wells of the sky. It is quite true that this indication of a reviving prosperity for our country suggests more than it proves. But at any rate it put me this afternoon, when I joined your party, into quite a right and hopeful mood for appreciating your conceptions of a better order of things. It is in fact simply to explain my appreciation that I am, in this most unconscionable way, now detaining you.

‘ Let me say in the first place, then, how profoundly right I consider the manner in which you set to work. For it is one of the most vital of all truths, that in a perfect state

all the parts will be perfect ; and that if the highest classes be as good as they can be, so also will be all the other classes. And I want to tell you, in the next place, how entirely fair and lovely did all the elements seem to be, out of which you composed for your higher classes their ideal existence. For you gave them every outward grace that could adorn life, and every inward taste and emotion that could enrich it, and every species of intellectual activity that could stimulate it. Your society was indeed to be truly the *crème de la crème* : it was to be made beautiful, and profound, and brilliant, by lovers, and theologians, and wits, and men of science, and poets, and philosophers, and humourists—all men and women of the world, and fit to live in society, as well as to educate it. This would indeed be, as was said at dinner, Rome and Athens and Florence, at their best, and let me add Paris also, united and reanimated, and enriched by the possession of yet wider knowledge, and the possibilities of freer speculation. That truly is a dazzling picture. But even that is not all. There was your city itself too, of which a lovely glimpse was given us, with its groves, its gardens, its palaces, and its exquisite reproductions of the world's noblest

architectures ; and all this under our softest English skies, and by our bluest English seas. Ah,' exclaimed Mr. Herbert, smiling, and clasping his hands gently, 'how I should like to live in a city like that ! I can literally see it now with my mind's eye, whilst I am talking. I see its private houses with their wonders of wrought marble ; I see its theatres, its museums, its chapels and churches of all denominations, its scientific lecture rooms, and its convents. For what strikes me more forcibly than anything is that all forms of faith and philosophy seem to find here an impartial home, and to unite in animating one harmonious social life. In fact, so vividly do I see this scene which your words have called up before me, that I want very much, if you will let me, to add one small feature to it, myself. It is a very humble detail, this of mine. In the eyes of the men of science, who lead modern thought, it is simply a sanitary matter. It relates to the way in which you shall dispose of your dead. Now in this, at least, you will be surprised to hear I quite keep pace with the times, being a sincere advocate for cremation ; and what I should want to do in your city, would be to supply it with an establishment, hidden underground, where the

bodies of the dead should be turned into gas, in properly devised retorts; the gas from each body being received in a small separate gasometer. Above these gasworks, and amongst your fair towers and spires, and your superb institutions, and art-galleries, I would build a circular domed temple of unbreathed marble, blind and blank upon the face of it, without carved work, and without window; only there should be written above the portal, not as in Dante's vision,

Per me si va nell' eterno dolore,
Per me si va tra la perduta gente—

but one verse out of our English translation of the Bible, for women and little children to read; and another verse out of a Latin poet, which is, I believe, an equivalent for the original of that translation, for men and scholars to read. The first should be, "Though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." And the other:

Quæris quo jaceas post obitum loco?
Quo non nata jacent.

And within, around the dark walls, should be a number of separate shrines, like—to use the simile that Dante would have chosen—the stalls in a great stable; and

to each shrine there should be a separate gas-jet. And when the life of any was over, after the fire had done its work upon the dead body, that man or woman who felt most bitterly the loss of the one that had been, should repair to this temple, to an appointed shrine, and there, in silence kneeling before it, should light the gas-jet; and thus evoking for the last time that which was once so loved and loving, pass, with what thoughts might be, a brief vigil before it, till its flicker grew slowly faint upon the watcher's face, and at length it went out and ended utterly and for ever. And above, over these sanctuaries of bereavement and final leave-taking, there should hang from the domed roof one rude iron lamp, always burning—casting a pale flare upwards upon the darkness. This would be the common lamp of the poor, for whose sake, dying, no one felt bereavement, or whom no one at any rate could find time to say good-bye to; but who thus united together, apart by themselves, would do all that would be at all seemly in them—would remind you mutely and unobtrusively by their joint light, that one thing at least they shared with you, namely death. It is not of the poor, however, that I am mainly thinking now. It is

of your higher classes, who have leisure to feel sorrow and all its holy influences. And these, I say, would find in this simple funeral service one that would meet all their diverse needs, and be in tune with all their diverse feelings. It would suit all. For to some it would symbolise an absolute disbelief in any life beyond; and to all the rest it would symbolise a bewildered doubt about any life beyond. For in one or other of these states of mind everyone would be.

‘Do you deny it?’ exclaimed Mr. Herbert, raising his voice suddenly, and looking round the theatre with a passionate anger, at which the whole audience were literally electrified. ‘Do you deny it?’ he exclaimed. ‘I tell you that it is so. I tell you too that that is your own case, and that in your Utopia you have aggravated the evil, and have not remedied it. You are all deniers or doubters, I tell you, every one of you. The deniers, I know, will not contradict me; so at present I need not speak to them. It is to you—the majority, you who *will* contradict me; you who are so busy with your various affirmations, with your prayers, your churches, your philosophies, your revivals of old Christianities, or your new improvements on them; with your love of justice, and

humanity, and toleration; it is to you that I speak. It is to you that I say that, however enlightened and however sure you may be about all other matters, you are darkened and uncertain as to this—whether there really is any God at all who can hear all the prayers you utter to Him, or whether there really is any other life at all, where the aspirations you are so proud of will be realised, and where the wrongs you are so pitiful over will be righted. There is not one amongst you who, watching a dead friend, flickering for the last time before you in the form of a gas-flame, and seeing how a little while and this flame was with you, and again a little while and it was not with you, would be at all sure whether this was really because, as your hearts would suggest to you, it went to the Father, or because, as your men of science would assert to you, it went simply—out.

‘Listen to me for a moment, and I can prove that this is so, to you. You are rich, and you have leisure to think of things in what light you will, and your life is to a great extent made easy for you by the labour of others. I do not complain of that. There can be no civilisation without order, and there can be no order without subordination. Outward goods must be apportioned un-

equally, or there would be no outward goods to apportion. But you who have the larger share of these are bound to do something for those who have the less. I say you are *bound* to do so ; or else sooner or later that larger share will be taken away from you. Well, and what is it you propose to do ? I know your answer—I have heard it a thousand times. You will educate them—you will teach them. And truly, if you know how to do that properly, you will have done all you need do. But,' exclaimed Mr. Herbert, his voice again rising, and quivering with excitement, 'that is just what you do not know. I am not casting my words at random. Out of your own mouths will I judge you. There never was a time when you talked so much as now about teaching the people, and yet do not you yourselves confess that you cannot agree together as to what to teach them ? You can agree about teaching them—I know this too well—countless things that you think will throw light upon life ; but life itself you leave a blank darkness upon which no light can be thrown. You say nothing of what is good in it, and of what is evil. Does success in it lie in the enjoyment of bodily pleasures, or in the doing of spiritual duty ? Is there anything in it that is right for its own sake,

or are all things right only because of their consequences? And seeing that, if we struggle for virtue, our struggles can never be quite successful here, is there any other place where they may have, I do not say their reward, but their consummation? To these questions only two answers can be given, and one must be entirely true, and the other entirely false. But you—you dare not give either; you are too enlightened. It is true that *you* can afford to be liberal about these matters; you can afford to consider truth and falsehood equally *tolerable*. But for the poor man surely it is not so. It must make some difference to him what you teach him, whether your teaching is to open his eyes to his God and to his duty, and so place his noblest happiness in his own hands, or whether it is to open his eyes to those *verified* Utilitarian principles from which he will learn that his own life and labour are only not utterly contemptible, because they conduce to a material well-being in which he himself can have no share. If, with entire belief yourselves, you are prepared to give him the former teaching, why then it is well and good both for him and you. But if not, beware of teaching him at all. You will but be removing a cataract from his mind's eye that he may stare aghast and

piteous at his own poverty and nakedness, or that he may gaze with a wild beast's hunger at your own truly noble prosperity which he can never taste, save in the wild beast's way.

‘ But enough of the poor ; enough of this division of happiness. Let me ask you to consider now what sort of happiness there is to divide—I say divide, meaning that you will get the whole of it. And as I have said before, this happiness is very fair in seeming. Knowledge, and culture, and freedom, and toleration—you have told us what fine things all these can do for you. And I admit it myself too ; I feel it myself too. Lovely, indeed, to look upon are the faiths, the philosophies, the enthusiasms of the world—the ancient products of the ages—as the sunshine of the modern intellect falls on them. See, they look clearer, and brighter, and more transparent—see, they form themselves into more exquisite and lucid shapes, more aërial structures. But why ? Do not deceive yourselves ; it is for a terrible reason. It is because, like a fabric of snow, they are one and all dissolving.

‘ Listen, and I will show you that this is so. Aristotle says that what is truly a man's Self is the thinking part of him. This sooner or later all the other parts obey—sooner or later,

willingly or unwillingly; and if this Self be base, the whole man will be base; if the Self be noble, the whole man will be noble. And as it is with the individual man, so it is with the ages and the generations. They obey their several Selves, whatever these Selves may be. The world once had a Self whose chief spokesman was a Jewish peasant called Jesus; and sooner or later the world followed him. Later on, it had a Self whose chief spokesmen were Dominics or Luthers or Loyolas; and in like manner the world followed them. Later still, it had got another Self, and the chief spokesmen of this were Voltaires and Rousseaus. And in each case the world was convinced at heart, consciously or unconsciously, that the vital truths of life were to be sought for only where these Selves sought for them. With Jesus and with Luther it sought them in duty and in a turning to the true God; with Voltaire and Rousseau, in justice, and in a turning from the false God. And now, where do you seek them? Where does the Self of your age seek them—your Self, that thinking part of you before which you all either quail or worship? Does it seek them either in justice, or loving-kindness, or in the vision of the most high God! No—but in the rotting bodies of dead men, or in

the writhing bodies of live cats. And in your perplexity, and your amazed despair, ever and again you cry to it, What shall we do to be saved? Show us the Father! Show us the high and holy One that inhabiteth Eternity! And what does your Self answer you? It answers you with a laugh, "There is no high and holy One at all. How say ye then to me, Show us the Father? For the Earth saith, He is not with me; and the depth saith, He is not with me; and our filthy phials of decaying animal matter say, He is not with us. Argal, ye poor foolish seekers, He is nowhere." You may try to escape from your own Self, but you cannot; you may try to forget its answer, but you cannot. Loudly you may affirm with your lips; but the importunate denial is ever at your heart. *Patriæ quis exsul se quoque fugit?*

‘What do you do then in this perplexity—this halting between two opinions? Why, you do this. You try to persuade yourselves that neither opinion is of much moment—that the question cannot be decided absolutely—that it should not be decided absolutely—in fact, that it is one of your chief glories that you leave it undecided. But I tell you, in that case, that though you say you are rich, and increased with goods, and have need of

nothing; you are, in reality, wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. I am not casting my words at random. Again out of your own mouths will I judge you. All your culture, you say, is based ultimately upon this—a discrimination between right and wrong. True, profoundly true. But will you be able to say what is right and what is wrong any longer, if you don't know *for whom* anything is right and *for whom* anything is wrong—whether it is for men with immortal souls, or only with mortal bodies—who are only a little lower than the angels, or only a little better than the pigs? Whilst you can still contrive to doubt upon this matter, whilst the fabric of the old faith is still dissolving only, life still for you, the enlightened few, may preserve what happiness it has now. But when the old fabric is all dissolved, what then? When all divinity shall have gone from love and heroism, and only utility and pleasure shall be left, what then? Then you will have to content yourselves with complete denial; or build up again the faith that you have just pulled down—you will have to be born again, and to seek for a new Self.

‘But suppose we accept denial, you will say, what then? Many deniers have lived noble lives, though they have looked neither

for a God nor for a heaven. Think of Greece, you will say to me, and that will answer you. No—but that is not so, and that will not answer me. The Greeks never, in your sense, denied God; they never, in your sense, denied eternal life—never, because they never knew them. They *felt* God only; they felt him unconsciously; and in denying the God they knew, they were really affirming the God they felt. But you—do not you deceive yourselves. Do not think you can ever again be as the Greeks. The world's progress has a twofold motion. History moves onwards round some undiscovered centre, as well as round what you consider its discovered axis; and though it seems to repeat itself, it never can repeat itself. The Atheism of the modern world is not the Atheism of the ancient: the long black night of the winter is not the swift clear night of the vanished summer. The Greek philosopher could not darken his life, for he knew not from what mysterious source the light fell upon it. The modern philosopher does know, and he knows that it is called God, and thus knowing the source of light he can at once quench it.

‘What will be left you then if this light be quenched? Will art, will painting, will poetry

be any comfort to you? You have said that these were magic mirrors which reflected back your life for you. Well—will they be any better than the glass mirrors in your drawing-rooms, if they have nothing but the same listless orgy to reflect? For that is all that will be at last in store for you; nay, that is the best thing that possibly can be in store for you; the only alternative being not a listless orgy for the few, but an undreamed-of anarchy for all. I do not fear that, however. Some will be always strong, and some will be always weak; and though, if there is no God, no divine and fatherly source of order, there will be, trust me, no aristocracies, there will still be tyrannies. There will still be rich and poor; and that will then mean happy and miserable; and the poor will be—as I sometimes think they are already—but a mass of groaning machinery, without even the semblance of rationality; and the rich, with only the semblance of it, but a set of gaudy, dancing marionettes, which it is the machinery's one work to keep in motion.

‘What, then, shall you do to be saved? Rend your hearts, I say, and do not mend your garments. Seek God earnestly, and peradventure you still may find Him—and I—even I may find Him also. For I—who

am I that speak to you? Am I a believer? No, I am a doubter too. Once I could pray every morning, and go forth to my day's labour stayed and comforted. But now I can pray no longer. You have taken my God away from me, and I know not where you have laid Him. My only consolation in my misery is that at least I am inconsolable for His loss. Yes,' cried Mr. Herbert, his voice rising into a kind of threatening wail, 'though you have made me miserable, I am not yet content with my misery. And though I too have said in my heart that there is no God, and that there is no more profit in wisdom than in folly, yet there is one folly that I will not give tongue to. I will not say Peace, peace, when there is no peace. I will not say we are still Christians, when we can sip our wine smilingly after dinner, and talk about some day defining the Father; and I will only pray that if such a Father be, He may have mercy alike upon those that hate Him, because they *will* not see Him; and on those who love and long for Him, although they no longer *can* see Him.'

Mr. Herbert's voice ceased. The curtain fell. The whirlwind was over; the fire was over; and after the fire, from one of the side boxes came a still small voice.

‘Very poor taste—very poor taste.’

It was perceived that Dr. Jenkinson, having discovered almost immediately who was really to be the preacher, had stolen back silently into the theatre.

CHAPTER II.

THE following morning Miss Merton had risen early, and was sauntering slowly before breakfast up and down the broad terrace in front of the house. She inhaled the fresh delightful air; she looked out over the breezy sea; she scanned the splendid villa, now shining in the sunlight, with its marble porticoes, and its long rows of windows; and she thought over yesterday with all its conversations and incidents. In especial, she thought of Laurence. She thought of him as he was now, and as he had been in former times, when they had known each other so well; and as she thought of him, she sighed.

‘And he might do so much,’ she said to herself, ‘and yet he is so weak and so irresolute; wasting his time in Paris and in London, reading poetry and buying pictures, and talking philosophy he doesn’t believe in with his diletante friends. And this place—this lovely place—how often does he come here?’

What does he do for his tenants and dependants—for all who ought to look for help to him? I have no patience with a man who keeps moaning about religion as he does, and yet won't act up to the light which he must have.'

Whilst she was thus meditating, the subject of her meditations appeared upon the terrace.

'You are out early,' he said. 'I have been just seeing Herbert off. He has had to go before everybody else, for he is *en route* for Italy.'

'You look very tired,' said Miss Merton sympathetically.

'Oh, it is nothing,' said Laurence, turning the subject. 'Did you notice Leslie last evening in the garden, and how odd his manner was? Do you remember, too, the pretty song he sang the night before, and how surprised we all were at it? Well, I had a letter yesterday, from a friend both of his and mine, which explains it. The heroine of the song was not an ideal young lady, though whether one can call her real any longer is more than I can say. She is dead. I don't know all the story; but my friend just gave me the outline, and enclosed a note for Leslie, to tell the news to him

himself. He never fancies he feels anything; but what he won't admit to himself, his manner, I am sure admitted to me, and I dare say to you too.'

'Yes,' said Miss Merton thoughtfully, 'I felt sure it must be something of that kind. But you,' she said, turning to Laurence, 'how utterly tired and worn-out you look.'

'To say the truth,' Laurence answered, 'I slept very little last night. I was thinking of our culture and our enlightenment. I was thinking of—God knows what; and why should I tell you? I'm sorry,' he said, 'that we're all breaking up to-day. I wish we could have kept the party together for a little longer. I don't know what I shall do. I can't stop here; I shan't go to London—I hate London. I had almost resolved, an hour ago, to go off to Italy with Herbert.'

'By way of finding some duty to do?' asked Miss Merton quietly.

'I *have* no duties,' said Laurence. 'Didn't Herbert very truly tell us so last night? But in Italy I should at least forget that I ever might have had any. And I should be then, at any rate, with a congenial friend. Herbert and I, you see, are two fools. We both of us want to pray, and we neither of us can.'

There was a long pause. At last Miss Merton said with some embarrassment, stooping as she did so to smell a red geranium.

‘I’m sure I wish I could be of any use to you; but really I don’t quite see how I can.’

There was another pause. At last Laurence said in a very low tone:

‘I cannot pray, because I do not believe in God. Will you pray for me?’

Miss Merton turned and looked at him with a soft, serious smile.

‘I did last night, if you wish very much to know,’ she said, and her cheek grew slowly tinted with an unconscious blush.

‘Did you?’ exclaimed Laurence with a sudden eagerness. ‘Then, if you cared enough for me to do that, will you care enough for me to do something far better than praying for me? Will you—’ he said, pausing and looking at her; ‘will you— But at that instant the gong for breakfast sounded, and the sentence died unfinished. Both he and she were perhaps a little grateful for this interruption. It relieved a sudden sense of shyness that had become painful, and to all intents and purposes their looks had already said all that need be said. It might, both felt, be securely left to find its way into words at a more convenient season. In an-

other moment they were in the midst of that most matter-of-fact bustle that precedes in country-houses the settling down to breakfast of a large party.

‘Well, Mr. Laurence,’ exclaimed Lady Ambrose, ‘all pleasant things come to an end at last. But this visit to you has really been positively delightful. And now, you must be careful not to forget me—that we are expecting you in September in Gloucestershire, to take part in our private theatricals. By-the-by,’ she added, sinking her voice to a fit solemnity, ‘I think I told you, didn’t I, how ill the poor Duchess of —— had been last week, though she’s better now, I am happy to hear this morning. Ham—tongue—pigeon-pie—omelette,’ she went on, as she sat down at the table; ‘why, amongst all this host of good things, I don’t know really what to choose. Well, suppose, Mr. Laurence, you were to bring me just the little—least bit of omelette. My dear,’ she whispered to Miss Merton, who was on one side of her, ‘what a dreadful blowing-up Mr. Herbert gave us last night, didn’t he? Now that, you know, I think is all very well in a sermon, but in a lecture, where the things are supposed to be taken more or less literally, I think it is a little out of place.’

‘Did you say just now,’ said Leslie, who found himself on the other side of Lady Ambrose, ‘that the Duchess of — was ill?’

‘Oh, it was just something I was telling Mr. Laurence,’ said Lady Ambrose coldly. ‘She’s much better now, thank you. Do you know her?’

‘She’s my aunt,’ said Leslie.

Lady Ambrose turned round and looked Leslie full in the face. As she looked, a smile began to dimple her cheek, and light up her sweet grey eyes.

‘You *don’t* say so!’ she exclaimed at last. ‘Why, of course you are. How stupid of me not to have found that out before. To be sure—you are the redoubtable Eton boy, who made such a dreadful commotion at Daleham by wanting to run away with the nursery governess. And to think that I have only discovered you at this last moment, when we are all of us going to say good-bye!’

‘Your carriage is at the door, my Lady,’ said a servant.

‘Already!’ said Lady Ambrose. ‘How time flies! Dr. Jenkinson, you and I are going to the train together, I believe. And now, Mr. Leslie,’ she went on, ‘Mr. Laurence

is coming to us, in September, for some private theatricals. I don't know if you do anything in that way yourself. But perhaps if you are in England, and have no better engagements, you will come with him. At any rate, if you won't, please to remember I shall think it very ill-natured of you.'

'Thank you,' said Leslie, smiling, 'I am not ill-natured.'

'I'm quite ready, Lady Ambrose, if you are,' said Dr. Jenkinson briskly; 'and now, Laurence,' he said, as he was standing in the portico, whilst Lady Ambrose was getting into the carriage, 'good-bye; I've had a most pleasant visit. But as to your Utopia, your ideal of the future—' he added confidentially, 'it has been said, foolishly enough, that God was the Brocken-phantom of self, projected on the mists of the *non-ego*. Well—your Utopia was the Brocken-phantom of the present, projected on the mists of the impracticable. It was simply the present with its homelier details left out. Good-bye—good-bye.'

'Then in that case,' said Laurence, as he bade adieu to the Doctor, 'it is a comfort to know from you that the Present, as it is, is the highest state of things conceivable.'

‘ Good-bye,’ said Lady Ambrose, with a smile in her beautiful frank eyes. ‘ Good-bye, Mr. Leslie, and mind that you don’t forget September.’

THE END.

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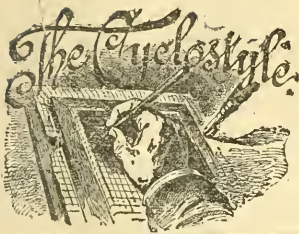
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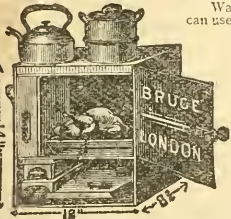
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